BLOOMY: MORE CITY MONEY FOR BETTER B'KLYN BRIDGE PARK. SEE P. 13

1978 30 years 2008

The Brooklyn Paper

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The Brooklyn Paper / Andy Campbell

A little off the bottom

Brooklyn Heights resident Lauren Alarcon found her tree on Montague Street on Wednesday — and later used our exhaustive events calendar to find other seasonal activities (see page 8).

RE-CYCLERS!

Activists restore Bedford Ave bike lane

By Sabrina Jaszi
for The Brooklyn Paper

Call it a bikelash!

A group of enraged cyclists fought back against the city for removing the Bedford Avenue bike lane last week, repainting the lane under cover of darkness last Friday night.

The two-wheeled crusaders went out late with rollers, paint, homemade stencils — and, of course, a video crew — to document their act of uncivil disobedience.

"We are NY city bicyclists and our message is clear," the dissidents announced at the end of their video. "Don't take away our bike lanes."

But early on Monday morning, when they returned to finish up, a patrol unit from South Williamsburg Shomrim Jewish police force, intervened and called cops.

After an investigation, the NYPD arrested two of the painters, but a source told The Brooklyn Paper that four more Williamsburg bikers and two Hasidim were also part of the re-laning effort.

The controversy began on Dec. 1 when the city sandblasted the painted bike lane along a 14-block stretch between Flushing and Division avenues, citing nearby bike paths along Kent and Wythe avenues as more than sufficient.

But that explanation did not quell persistent rumors in the biking and blogging communities that the lane was removed at the behest of Hasidic leaders, who claim that the lane hinders buses dropping off and picking up children at the numerous religious schools on the route, and populates the neighborhood with scantily clad females.

See BIKE LANE on page 11

YouTube

YouTube

Bike activists repainted the Bedford Avenue bike lane last Friday — and much of their effort was still visible this week.

Marathon man! Lethem finishes book

Nine-hour reading — yes, nine hours! — caps 'Chronic' night

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

Only 13 were left — and certainly not standing — when the all-out war between Jonathan Lethem and his new novel ended at 4:11 am on Saturday.

It might never have come to this — a nine-hour marathon reading — had the Bard of Boerum Hill not failed so dismally in his promise to read the entirety of his new 467-page book, "Chronic City," on eight successive nights between Oct. 16 and Dec. 4 at BookCourt — his home turf.

Even after adding an extra session last week at Word bookshop in Greenpoint, Lethem still had roughly half of the doorstopper to go.

Still, he started promptly at 7 pm, gleam in his eye and a few jokes up his sleeve. He said he timed the reading himself — though he was smart enough to not reveal the estimated time of completion.

By 7:40 pm, he was already pouring sweat like Jerry Lewis on Labor Day — and he was losing fans fast.

"After a certain amount of time, you kinda just feel like a groupie," said Kingman Brewster who had been to only one of the prior "Lethem vs. 'Chronic City'" readings.

Brewster left at 8 pm; Lethem pressed on.

"I'll make it," he said, as the blazer came off.

Another hour passed. Wine cups came out, bread was broken, and Lethem lost the top button of his shirt.

But he wasn't the only person in the bookstore who was enduring. Brent Shearer attended a whopping six of the "Chronic City" readings. As a result, Lethem promised him the book that the Bard was reading from — if he made it to the end.

See LETHEM on page 13

The Brooklyn Paper / Andy Campbell

Jonathan Lethem hosted a nine-hour reading at BookCourt that started on Friday night (left) and ended at 4:11 the next morning (right).

Bruce's big bonds bombshell

Ratner's tax-free bonds to go on sale next week

By Stephen Brown
The Brooklyn Paper

Get 'em while they're hot! The tax-exempt bonds that are critical to financing the Atlantic Yards arena are set to go on the market next week — and they're expected to sell faster than you can say "land grab."

Earlier this month, Moody's and Standard and Poor's rated the state's tax-free bonds as Baa3 and BBB–, respectively — meaning that the $500 million in bonds are as risky an investment as those used to finance previous sports projects like Yankee Stadium and Citi Field.

Still, the fact that the rating is just above junk-bond status — a term all too familiar from the economic crisis — provided ample fodder to those opposed to the project because it reflects a current economic climate that's inhospitable to projects that rely so heavily on revenue sources like naming-rights deals, luxury boxes and advertising.

Indeed, several years ago, Ratner and his partners at the Empire State Development Corporation believed they could issue $900 million in bonds because the project appeared more likely turn a handsome profit, and thus pay back investors with less risk.

Additionally, Ratner will have far less equity in the project, once he completes the sale of 80 percent of the team — at a huge loss — to Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov.

Still, there is little doubt that big institutions like hedge funds, banks, and insurance agencies will not hesitate to snatch up the bonds when they go on the market well before they lose their much-coveted tax-exempt status on Jan. 1, when an IRS rule change kicks in that bars such developer-friendly financing schemes.

With the $500 million raised from the bond sale, plus the city and state's long-promised contribution of $273

See BONDS on page 11

FSP Architects

The state will sell tax-free bonds next week to finance Bruce Ratner's controversial arena.

The Explainer

The state is about to issue bonds to pay for the Atlantic Yards arena. But what's it all mean? Let The Explainer break it down.

OK, what's the deal with these Atlantic Yards bonds?
The state's bonds, which will go on sale next week, are a loan on behalf of Bruce Ratner, who can't issue tax-free bonds himself. The loan will finance construction of the project, and Ratner is expected to pay back the state with payments in lieu of taxes.

Stop right there. What are "payments in lieu of taxes"?
Instead of paying normal property tax on the arena land, Ratner will make fixed payments — which won't fluctuate based on the land's value, as normal property taxes do. This arrangement helped finance other stadium projects — though the IRS finally nixed their use, effective on Jan. 1, 2010, because the scheme cheats taxpayers out of actual property tax revenue.

Last week, bond rating agencies gave the Atlantic Yards notes a less-than-stellar rating. What does that mean?
Moody's, which uses a Baa3 rating, and Standard & Poor's, which called theirs BBB–, based such ratings on projections of how much money the Nets and their arena will make — and revenue projections have dropped due to the ailing economy, which affects Ratner's ability to sell everything from that extra hot dog to a big luxury suite.

So how bad is his bond rating?
Baa3 and BBB– are one step above junk bonds — but don't misunderstand. All it means is that there is a slightly greater risk to investors — who get a slightly better interest rate in return for taking that higher risk. A AAA-rated bond is safer — but also doesn't yield as much interest for the investor.

See EXPLAINER on page 11

Maimonides Good Health Message

Four ways to fight the flu.

1. GET VACCINATED

- Vaccination is the best way to protect against seasonal and H1N1 flu. There are two different vaccines available this year, one for the seasonal flu and another for the H1N1 flu.
  - The seasonal flu vaccine is indicated for children up to 18 years, adults over 50 and for people with chronic illnesses.
  - The H1N1 vaccine is especially important for
    - Children 6 months to 24 years
    - Pregnant women
    - Healthcare workers
    - Family members and caregivers of infants and young children
    - Adults 25 to 64 with chronic illnesses and their caregivers
- NOTE: People 65 and older are not at high risk of illness from H1N1 and do not need to receive the H1N1 vaccine.

2. COVER YOUR COUGH

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Or, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hand
- Put your used tissue in the wastebasket

3. CLEAN YOUR HANDS

- Frequently wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, especially after you cough or sneeze
- Or, clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner

4. STAY HOME

- If you are sick, stay at home until you've felt completely well for a day
- Call your doctor to discuss whether you need medicine for flu
- Do not visit your loved ones in the hospital
- Call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov/flu or www.flu.gov for more information

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Underground man

This guy plays one weird guitar

http://
See the video at BrooklynPaper.com

By Stephen Brown
The Brooklyn Paper

It looks like an instrument out of the Mos Eisley cantina in "Star Wars," and appropriately enough, its eccentric inventor has dubbed it "Guitar2-D2."

Ben Simon, the mad musical scientist of Williamsburg, hauls his 19-pound guitar-keyboard-drum machine hybrid to the subway most days, though he doesn't always earn a living.

Perhaps onlookers at stops on the L train and in Union Square are so in awe of Simon's creation that they forget to drop money in his basket; the massive robo-guitar is indeed quite a sight.

Sporting five speakers, about 70 buttons, 10 dials, the guitar creates a musical cacophony unlike any — judging by onlookers' faces — heard before.

"I get the best reactions, that's one of the most rewarding parts, watching peoples' faces," said Simon. "Sometimes they're confused, other times they just smile."

It takes 16 rechargeable batteries — of different sizes — to power this wacky creation, which would likely be a hit with (or one of) the robots in the Terminator movies.

The inspiration for the guitar came after an ill-fated tour through Europe with a full band. After the drummer "actually went insane," Simon decided the answer to his problems was to create a guitar that brought percussion along with it. Simon planned to leave his unstable bandmates in the dust, instead opting to become a one-man music machine.

"In some ways, it makes a lot more sense to do it by yourself," he said. "I thought about it almost like a futuristic spinoff of folk music. Show up, play and you don't have to plug it in anywhere."

While living in solitude on a farm in South Carolina, Simon began to envision what would become his crowning achievement in his 29 years of existence. Typically awaking at 5 am, Simon toiled eight hours a day for five weeks straight, first envisioning every step of the process before building "Guitar2-D2."

The Brooklyn Paper/ Will Talarico

Ben Simon can be found many days playing "Guitar2-D2" in the Bedford Avenue station.

"First, I built it in my mind," said Simon while sitting in his Spartan Williamsburg apartment with only a few sheets on the floor as a bed. "I'm amazed at how well it works."

Simon created the funky sounds through circuit bending, a process in which he removed the circuit boards from a 1980s-era Yamaha keyboard and a BOSS drum machine and re-soldered their wires.

Simon considers the guitar his opus, and it is the culmination of two previous ax reimaginings. Dubbed "Firefly vs. Spider Web" and "Social Anxiety Disorder," the former features removable speakers that protrude from the body, and the latter a jagged, crooked neck with two amps built inside.

Still, Simon — who is currently unemployed — has yet to turn his fit of inspiration into financial success. He's sold a few of his CDs for $10, gotten a few invitations to play at clubs, and even had a $1-trillion bill from Zimbabwe dropped in his basket — but that and $2.25 will get you on the subway.

But Simon does not dream of riches — in fact, he said he had recently had a dream where someone dropped a measly $15 check in his basket. Instead, he hopes to convey his enthusiasm to young kids.

"I'd like to teach dropouts, kids that don't have much of a chance to build instruments," he said. "It is really fulfilling."

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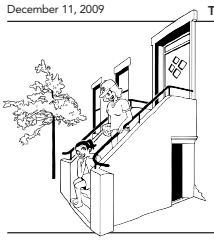

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PARK SLOPE

The Brooklyn Paper / Gersh Kuntzman

It's ready! The long-promised conversion of the old armory on Eighth Avenue in Park Slope is tantalizingly close to being done, but it'll still be weeks before the public is allowed in.

Armory almost ready (really!)

By Gersh Kuntzman
The Brooklyn Paper

The long-delayed Park Slope Armory's rebirth as a neighborhood recreation center really is now imminent, The Brooklyn Paper has learned.

Just before the Thanksgiving holiday, the city completed all its final building inspections, the last step before the Department of Homeless Services can hand over the keys to the Prospect Park YMCA.

The handoff begins the YMCA's six- to eight-week transformation of the renovated former armory building on Eighth Avenue into a gym and school recreation center.

That puts Y Executive Director Sean Andrews on schedule for a mid-January opening for school kids. Paying members will follow shortly thereafter, he said.

Though the project has long been delayed, Andrews has a firm deadline of Feb. 3 — when Borough President Markowitz christens the building with his annual State of the Borough Address, an event that typically draws thousands.

Markowitz will no doubt tout the creation of a new resource for Park Slope residents and area schools, but the project has been frustrating for those very users. The city's $16-million renovation of the former 14th Regiment Armory was completed in 2007, but the recreational space is still unused.

Critics partly blame the Department of Education, which initially pledged some money because its schoolkids would use the facility during the day. But those city funds dried up, and potential private operators ran for the hills.

Andrews's YMCA jumped into the breach, promising to meet the city's demands of a recreation space for local schools, plus senior programs, exercise programs for kids, reduced-cost memberships for low-income families, art programs, and other offerings. All of that would be subsidized by operating a paid facility for exercise classes, weight lifting and cardiovascular fitness.

The YMCA needs about 2,500 members to cover its $1-million operational budget. Andrews admitted that he needs to sell a lot of $40-per-month memberships at a gym whose main recreational area is off limits from 9 am-2 pm every day.

It is gorgeous, though.

WILLIAMSBURG

'Rose' developer bankrupt!

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

The Brooklyn Paper / Sara Aziz

A developer wants to replace this lumber center just south of Schaefer Landing (background) on Kent Avenue with an 800-unit complex.

Here's another reason why the would-be developer of an 800-unit apartment complex on the South Williamsburg waterfront is so desperate to get his site's zoning changed from manufacturing to residential: He's belly up.

A bankruptcy court ruling shows that Isack Rosenberg — who owns the Kent Avenue lumber yard that he hopes to transform into the glittery "Rose Plaza on the River" — owes Capital One upwards of $50 million from an unrelated real estate project in Williamsburg. The bank holds the mortgage in a condominium venture referred to in court papers as the "McCaren [sic] Project."

It is unclear where the project is and what payments Rosenberg failed to make that triggered his bankruptcy filing earlier this year.

By court order, Rosenberg has until Dec. 21 to pay off Capital One, either by selling the project or finding the cash by other means, according to the bankruptcy document.

As such, Rosenberg is trying to raise money by seeking a city rezoning of his lumber yard site from manufacturing to residential — a move that would vastly increase the property's value.

Last week, Community Board 1 overwhelmingly rejected Rosenberg's rezoning bid, complaining that only 20 percent of the 3.7-acre complex would be set aside as below-market-rate-housing. Members also complained that 95 percent of the units were smaller than three bedrooms, a particular affront to members of the Hasidic community, which tends to have large families.

That CB1 vote was not without its juicy backstory, however. Rosenberg is a member of the Aroni faction of the deeply riven Satmar community. A rival, Rabbi David Niederman, is not only a member of Community Board 1, but an influential rabbi in the Zali faction.

"These guys have been rivals for years," said one Hasidic insider.

Neiderman has said that he rejected Rosenberg's rezoning request on the merits, but he has supported similar rezonings with the same level of affordable housing in the past. And Niederman is an enthusiastic proponent of the 31-acre Broadway Triangle rezoning in East Williamsburg, a site at which his group, the United Jewish Organization, won the development rights in a controversial process earlier this year.

BOERUM HILL

Lutherans break silence

Bishop explains Bethlehem church battle

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

The Brooklyn Paper / Jason Calan

Pastor-in-exile Norman David held another of his sidewalk services outside the Bethlehem Lutheran Church on Pacific Street on Saturday to pray and protest the church leadership's decision to shut down the building.

The governing body of local Lutheran churches has finally fired back — albeit in the form of a press release — against charges that it illegally locked out the congregation at Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

But the previously silent Metropolitan New York Synod did little to put the dispute behind it, calling the parishioners "a former congregation of the Synod" and the battle with the congregation-in-exile a simple civil matter between "one member of the congregation" and the sect's leadership.

In his statement, Synod leader Bishop Robert Rimbo painted a different picture of the three-year-old dispute than the one offered by the members of the congregation, who meet in exile at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brooklyn Heights or set up a table in front of the scaffolding-covered Pacific Street church on Saturdays.

"Since 2004, the congregation of Bethlehem was in decline," Rimbo said. "At a congregational meeting (with a quorum present) in 2007, the congregation voted to close, therefore turning the church property over to the Synod."

He said that the unnamed member then sued, "without the consent of the congregation or the Synod" to "take ownership of the property."

A civil court ruled in favor of the Synod.

But the banished congregation's de facto leader, Rev. Norman David, is still fighting. After Rimbo issued his statement, David fired back — also in a press release — that the Synod bullied the congregation into voting to hand over the property at that meeting in January, 2007. David claims that the Synod called an emergency meeting at the end of a service one night and hurriedly called for a vote that Bethlehem be shut down due to budget shortfalls.

That vote passed amid threats and "confusion," David said, essentially handing over the deed to the Synod and de-sanctifying Bethlehem Lutheran as a church.

Now David holds weekly services outside the shuttered church in protest, using an overturned trash can as a pulpit while others in his congregation hold signs calling for the reclamation of the church.

"We're demanding that the building be returned," said David, who has raised one-quarter of the $200,000 he said he'll need to continue his civil suit. "The suit's just one small part of the big picture, though, because Bethlehem is the latest instalment of a pattern where the Synod is preying on small congregations."

WILLIAMSBURG

Another year for 'pool' parties

State makes East River park available for concerts

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

At ease, hipsters, it now looks like the "pool parties" will be back this summer.

The state Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has backtracked from its announcement six weeks ago that East River State Park would not be able to accommodate Jelly NYC's concert series for a second year, paving the way for a summer of outdoor music and dance.

"There's still some paperwork, but as far as state parks is concerned, there will be concerts," said Rachel Gordon, the regional director for state parks.

It's unclear what the sticking point was, but the prospect of a concert-less summer prompted community groups and Sen. Chuck Schumer — an apparent "pool party" fan — to rally for another year in East River State Park, the default location after the parties were booted in 2008 from McCarren Park Pool so that space could be restored as an actual swimming hole.

Jelly NYC founder Alexander Kane, who has spent the last five years bringing in big names like Grizzly Bear, TV on the Radio and the Beastie Boys, wasn't sure why his series got a new lease on life, but he was happy anyway.

"It's good to know everything's right on track," Kane said. "We're going tos go pretty big this year for our fifth anniversary.

"It'll be our coolest year yet," he said.

The Brooklyn Paper / Andy Campbell

Bloomy shovels dirt at McCarren Pool

Mayor Bloomberg formally broke ground on the $50-million restoration of McCarren Park Pool in Greenpoint on Monday. Since it was closed in 1984, the neighborhood was without its beloved swimming hole — though the ruins reopened in 2005 as a hot indie rock show venue. But that fame ended last February when Bloomberg promised to restore the Robert Moses–era pool, which is on Lorimer Street between Driggs and Bayard avenues, by spring 2012. "I don't know how good we look in swimsuits, but we'll make good on our promise to be the first ones to jump in," Bloomberg said at the groundbreaking, where a half-finished building provided an ironic backdrop. *— Andy Campbell*

FORT GREENE

Baryshnikov's ballet company inks BAM deal

By Stephen Witt
Community Newspaper Group

Move over Lincoln Center, Baryshnikov's old ballet company is coming to Brooklyn.

The American Ballet Theater announced last Monday that it had entered into a five-year pas de deux with the Brooklyn Academy of Music — and borough dance lovers will get their first sugarplum from the deal when ABT presents Tchaikovsky's classic, "The Nutcracker," next December.

"BAM is an extraordinary institution, committed to artistic excellence, and we cannot think of a better collaborator for our performances in Brooklyn," said ABT Executive Director Rachel Moore. "The opportunity to engage new audiences in this vibrant community is immeasurably important to ABT and its mission."

That mission includes programs in public schools that are tailored for grades 2–5 and foster an appreciation for the performing arts (and, not coincidentally, create the next generation of paying audiences).

ABT's "Nutcracker" is choreographed by former Bolshoi bigwig Alexei Ratmansky. Decades ago, ABT's calling card was its artistic director, the high-stepping Soviet defector Mikhail Baryshnikov, who ran ABT from 1980 to 90.

On Monday, BAM President Karen Brooks Hopkins gushed about the new alliance with one of the world's best-loved ballet troupes.

"These performances will thrill audiences of all ages and provide residual benefits to business establishments in the BAM neighborhood at large," she said.

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POLE VAULT!

Thousands in fines for one illegal act

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

A Brooklyn Heights small business owner faces thousands in fines — even though she only posted one thing on a Court Street lamppost.

The owner of the design firm Sketch & Hammer, Susan Hager, freely admits that she taped an envelope containing 15 of business cards for her custom deck and garden company on that lamppost back in April.

But she is fighting the decision by the sanitation worker to write separate summons for each of the business cards rather than for the one envelope that contained them.

"It said I'll be paying a minimum of $75 for each card, and I could ultimately pay up to $3,000 for the whole deal," said Hager, who received the summonses in the mail last week. "I don't mind paying $75, but $3,000?"

Small businesses say that such overzealous enforcement of sanitation and other "quality of life" crimes is the norm under Mayor Bloomberg, whose third-term re-election effort was frequently dogged by charges that he isn't doing enough for Mom and Pop.

That sense trickled up to the City Council, which passed a bill in November to give drivers a grace period on parking tickets — on the grounds that Bloomberg's meter maids were handing out too many "gotcha" tickets just seconds after the time expired.

Despite that context, Hager did break the rules and the summonses against her were legitimate, said Sanitation spokesman Matt LiPani.

"It's illegal posting," he said. "If you post 20 cards on one pole or multiple poles, it's 20 different infractions."

A scofflaw has no idea that he or she has done anything wrong for months, because the Sanitation Department sometimes mails the summonses well after the alleged infraction, tracking down the violator through information on the fliers themselves.

In Hager's 26 years in business locally, she said she's never seen a fine so outrageous, so she'll fight the charge at her first court hearing on Dec. 11. Until then, she's warning other small business owners to find a different way to promote their companies.

"Post inside of restaurants," she said. "Or they will track you."

The Brooklyn Paper / Andy Campbell

Susan Hager says she's facing thousands in city fines for hanging a single packet of fliers on a lamppost.

Mugged along Gowanus

POLICE BLOTTER

Find more online every Wednesday at
BrooklynPaper.com/blotter

78TH PRECINCT
Park Slope

Two gunman mugged a man near the Gowanus Canal on Nov. 29, but didn't get far with his iPod and phone before cops collared them.

The victim told police that he was on Union Street between Third Avenue and Nevins Street at around 10 pm when a man approached, pulled a black handgun and screamed, "Get on the ground and give me everything you have!"

The man got down, allowing a second perp to rifle his pockets for the digital music player, the phone and $45 before the two thugs fled.

It's unclear how cops nabbed their suspects, but the police report indicates that the arrests came just minutes after the crime.

Mad hatter

A gang of four hoodlums stole a woman's hat right off her head on Seventh Avenue on Nov. 29.

Cops said that the quarrelsome quartet approached the woman near Garfield Place at about 3 pm and started yelling sexually suggestive curses at her.

During the verbal assault, one of the thugs snatched the hat off her pate, and all four fled towards Prospect Park.

Phone pick

In the latest proof that talking on a cellphone is often the first step in getting it stolen, a thief grabbed a teenager's phone as she chatted on it on Dec. 3 on Eighth Avenue.

The 17-year-old told cops that she was between First and Second streets at around 7:30 pm when a thief ran up from behind her, grabbed the phone and kept on running.

Ice burgs

There were at least six reported burglaries last week. Here's a round-up:

• A thief took more than turkey when he broke into a Fourth Street apartment, stealing two computers and a camcorder sometime between Nov. 24 and Nov. 28. The resident of the apartment, which is near Seventh Avenue, said her back window was broken, too.

• A woman told cops that only her ex-boyfriend and her "ex-friend" had access to the basement apartment in her Union Street building — and she thinks one of them took her computer and jewelry on Nov. 26. The 45-year-old was not in the unit, which is between Seventh and Eighth avenues, from 10 am to 1 pm that day. There was no sign of forced entry, so maybe she's onto something.

• A thief used a fire escape to enter two apartments in the same Third Street building on Nov. 28, leaving with a computer and a Nintendo game system from one and a laptop from another. One resident said he discovered the crime in his apartment, which is between Sixth and Seventh avenues, when he came home at 5 pm. The other said she found out about the crime three hours earlier.

• A man told police that he returned to his Fifth Street apartment on Dec. 2 to "remove his belongings by court order" only to find that all of his photography equipment — $38,000 worth of it — had already been removed by someone else. The 42-year-old victim had no clue about who took the high-end cameras and lenses from the apartment, which is between Fifth and Sixth avenues.

• A thief took advantage of lax security at a Third Avenue construction site on Dec. 2, stealing two heavy-duty saws. Police said the crook entered the job site, which is at 13th Street, at around 11:30 am and was gone in 600 seconds.

Old gold

Yet another ancient car — this time a 1996 Toyota Camry — has been swiped off a neighborhood street.

The latest example of a senior set of wheels disappearing came overnight on Dec. 1 when perps broke into the sedan near the corner of Flatbush Avenue and Eastern Parkway sometime between 7 pm and 2:30 pm the next day.

— Gersh Kuntzman

88TH PRECINCT
Fort Greene–Clinton Hill

Gambling gun

Three dangerous thugs held up the 99 Cent Plus Grocery on Lafayette Avenue, and took cash and scratch-offs on Dec. 2.

A worker was closing up at 8:50 pm when three men forced themselves inside the store, which is near Clifton Place. One had a handgun, and hit the victim on the forehead. The trio ran off with $2,990 and a chance to win more — $100 in typically useless Lotto tickets.

Dept. steal

A thief ripped off a woman at the Marshall's department store on Dec. 3.

The victim was shopping inside the discounter inside the Atlantic Center Mall at around 4:30 pm when the sneak took her purse off her cart while her back was turned. He got away with credit cards and a Blackberry.

Immature four

Four teenage thugs did more than pick on a younger teen after school on Dec. 4.

The 14-year-old victim said he was walking to the Atlantic Center Mall mall at around 3:40 pm, but when he was at the corner of Ashland and Hanson places, the older kids walked up and grabbed his digital musical player.

Empty gestures

A thief made a vivid threat to extract a woman's purse as she was entering a friend's house on Clermont Avenue on Dec. 6.

The victim was outside on the stoop near Myrtle Avenue at midnight when the perp approached from behind and said, "Give me what you got or I'll blow your brains out."

The woman gave up her purse — which contained nothing of value.

— Sabrina Jaszi

94TH PRECINCT
Greenpoint–Williamsburg

Purse capers

Two men attacked and robbed a woman on her way out from a Chase bank on Manhattan Avenue on Dec. 2.

The woman exited the ATM between Calyer Street and Meserole Avenue at around 7 pm and was immediately met by a crook, who grabbed her, pushed her against a parked minivan, and snatched her purse along with her wallet and cellphone. The second thief acted as a lookout before the two got away.

The woman was not able to get a good look at her assailants.

Jackpot

A man with access to a Bedford Avenue ATM got away with $7,860 on Dec. 4 — and the cash machines owner is convinced that the thief is one of his guys.

Many workers from the maintenance company have keys and the combination to the ATM between N. Seventh and Eighth streets, the machine's owner told police — and there was no sign of forced entry, so cops also believe that the burglary was an inside job.

School bully

A dastardly crook mugged a 15-year-old boy for $20 on Bedford Avenue on Dec. 1.

The victim was walking back to class at Automotive HS near McCarren Park at around noon when the bully walked up and asked, "Where's my money?"

The victim gave him cash, and told officers that this particular jerk had taken his money before.

iBreak-in

A not-so-stealthy burglar kicked in a door at a Withers Street home on Dec. 1 and stole some electronics, but a neighbor may have seen the swindler.

The 26-year-old victim returned to his home, which is between Manhattan and Graham avenues, to find the door battered and several laptops, two cameras and an iPod missing. He told officers the crime must have occurred between 9:30 am and 8 pm. A neighbor said a suspicious character was in the building earlier, but couldn't identify him.

Car jackings

Four vehicles were reported stolen last week:

• A 2002 Honda Civic was picked up off Wythe Avenue between N. 14th and 15th streets at around 8 pm on Dec. 1.

• A beastly 2003 Explorer was lifted from the intersection of Berry and N. Third streets sometime between Dec. 4 and 5 while the owner was away.

• Crooks made off with a brand new Vespa on Graham Avenue between Engert Avenue and Newton Street sometime between Dec. 2 and 5.

• A 2005 Toyota Camry was taken from Jewel Street between Norman and Nassau avenues on Dec. 5.

— Andy Campbell

90TH PRECINCT
Williamsburg–Bushwick

Strangled

An NYU student was choked and robbed after coming out of the Morgan Street L-train station on Dec. 6.

The young scholar was on McKibbin Street near Bogart Street at 8 pm when her aggressor approached from behind, wrapped both arms around her neck and choked her until she dropped to the ground, unconscious.

When she came to, her purse — which contained $20 — was gone.

Child's prey

Cops caught two very naughty boys who attempted to rob a 55-year-old woman on Manhattan Avenue on Dec. 6.

The woman told police that she was near McKibbin Street at 9:50 am when two little thugs approached.

One of them grabbed her purse, but a nearby witness grabbed him, and held him until police were on the scene. The 11-year-old criminal quickly gave up his 14-year old accomplice.

Antisocial

A thief scaled the side of a Hope Street building to steal a computer on Dec. 2.

The victim left his apartment, which is near Keap Street, at 8:30 am and returned after a hard day at the office to find that the creeper had entered through the balcony door, which was unlocked, and left with an Apple MacBook.

Roughhousing

A mugger lightened the load for a couple horsing around in front of a S. Third Street apartment building on Dec. 1.

The victim told cops that she was trying to carry her boyfriend into his home, located near Berry Street, at 1:30 am when a man approached.

"Can I help?" he asked. But the thug — whose breath was boozy — had other things in mind. He punched the young woman in the eye, then stole her wallet and Blackberry.

— Sabrina Jaszi

76TH PRECINCT
Carroll Gardens–Cobble Hill–Red Hook

Gun nab

Cops nabbed a 16-year-old with a loaded .357 Luger on Dec. 1.

Police say that the teen, a resident of the Gowanus Houses, was apprehended when he allegedly flashed the gun near the corner of Warren and Hoyt streets at 7:50 pm.

Officer Carlos Anchundia got the gun off the kid without incident. The weapon had been reported stolen from a home in North Carolina.

Choke and rob

A 78-year-old man was punched in the head, choked and mugged by a pack of thugs on Nov. 30.

The victim told cops that he was on Lorraine Street near Otsego Street just before 7 pm when the six suspects jumped him, beat him up and stole $45.

Playground pick

Two teen terrors roughed up a 17-year-old and stole his backpack at a playground near the Baltic and Hoyt streets on Dec. 3 — but they didn't get far.

The victim told cops that he was in the playground at around 3 pm when the thugs confronted him, pushed and shoved him and ran off with his Gears of War backpack.

The thieves didn't get much: four note pads, a pair of prescription glasses and a math textbook.

Cops later rounded up the suspects and charged them with robbery.

Small change

Ten thieves robbed a 15-year-old of $10 following a shoving match on Baltic Street on Nov. 26.

The victim said he was between Smith and Hoyt streets at 3 pm when the posse of thieves surrounded him and took the $10 before running off to spend their paltry spoils.

— Thomas Tracy

77TH PRECINCT
Prospect Heights

Big Mac attack

Three renegade girls, one of them as young as 13-years-old, assaulted another teenager — and her school's principal! — at a McDonald's on Nov. 19.

The three loose cannons struck around 3:45 pm at the burger joint at Vanderbilt and Atlantic avenues, kicking and punching their 13-year-old victim as the principal struggled to protect her hapless student.

Both the headmistress and the teen were sent to the hospital with pains in the head, back and chest, while their assailants fled.

iThievery

Everyone loves the iPhone, including thieves:

• Two brigands clocked a man in the back of the head on Dec. 5, snatching the really smart phone and leaving him with a swollen dome. The thugs made their move around midnight at Park Place and Vanderbilt Avenue.

• A troublemaker snatched the must-have device from a commuter on a Flatbush Avenue-bound 2 train on Dec. 1, only to be caught by cops as he made his getaway. The 18-year-old struck around 5 pm, and cops say they caught him mere minutes later at Washington and Flatbush avenues. Officer Derek Andrews got credit for the collar.

Big time burgs

At least two apartments were burglarized. Here's the bad news:

• A woman came home on Nov. 18 to discover that thieves heisted a $15,000 ring from her St. Marks Avenue apartment. When she returned, she discovered that the front door was open to the unit, which is between Vanderbilt and Underhill avenues, and the bling was gone.

• A thief busted into a St. Johns Place apartment on Nov. 20, escaping through a window with a stash of Apple gear. The resident, who lives between Washington and Classon avenues, came home at 6:30 pm to find that her laptop and iPod were gone.

68TH PRECINCT
Bay Ridge

Sleep aweigh

Was he snoring too loudly? A 27-year-old man who had been snoozing in his car on 89th Street was beaten and robbed by two evil insomniacs on Dec. 4.

The victim said that he was taking an early morning siesta near Third Avenue at around 5 am when two strangers approached and ordered him out of his vehicle.

When he exited the car, the wake-up crew struck him in the face and made off with his credit cards, driver's license and a fancy cellphone.

80th St. slash

A 29-year-old man was the victim of a blitzkrieg knife attack as he exited his 80th Street home on Dec. 1.

The victim said that he had just opened the door to his home near 13th Avenue at 6:11 am when a man jumped him and began hacking at him with a blade, leaving deep cuts to his face.

The assailant fled as the victim was removed to Lutheran Medical Center for treatment.

Computer swipe

A thief swiped a laptop computer from a 68th Street home on Dec. 4.

The 45-year-old victim told cops that she returned to the house, which is between Eighth Avenue and Fort Hamilton Parkway, at around 4 pm to find the missing item.

Unholy thief

Cops are scouring the surveillance footage to find the uncharitable churchgoer who rifled a woman's purse during a Nov. 21 at St. Anselm's.

The 62-year-old woman told police that she had left her purse in her pew as she went to receive communion at 1:30 pm.

That's when the thief made a bee-line for her bag, removing $300 and some credit cards before running out of the 82nd Street house of worship.

— Thomas Tracy

84TH PRECINCT
Brooklyn Heights–DUMBO–Boerum Hill–Downtown

Felony focus

Glasses are expensive! That's why a nearsighted purse snatcher headed straight to Macy's Optical after making his grab on Dec. 4.

The victim was queued up at 99 Cents City on Hoyt Street at 11:20 am when a man nabbed her bag off the handle of her stroller. After getting the $80 and credit cards, he bolted straight to the eyewear emporium.

Bike by

A ride-by purse snatcher did his work from the safety of his bicycle seat on Dec. 3.

The victim, a young woman, was on Warren Street near Third Avenue at 11:05 pm, when the cycling creep rolled by, lifting her pocketbook from her shoulder. It contained an iPod nano, a Mexican driver's license and her New York ID.

Pump plucked

A thief forced a new mother to feed her baby the old fashioned way, after he took packages from the lobby of her Pierrepont Street building on Dec. 3.

The victim, who'd recently given birth, left her home, near Hicks Street, at 11:30 am and returned at 6:30 pm to find that a thief had broken the building's front window and gotten inside, where he took her new breast pump and various other baby products.

— Sabrina Jaszi

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GO BROOKLYN

(718) 260-2500 *The Brooklyn Paper's essential guide to the Borough of Kings* December 11, 2009

Lumps of coal

The Butcher takes his axe to two holiday offerings

The two pre-eminent Brownstone Brooklyn theater companies — the Heights Players and the Gallery Players — have trotted out hoary old Christmas "classics" this season. How do they stack up? Our own yule-loving Butcher of Flatbush Avenue Extension readies his axe for two Christmas whacks.

Bella Muccari

McLovin': Joanna Parson and Adam Segalle star in the Gallery Players' production of "Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge," now through Dec. 20.

Sorry, Charlie!

'Good Man' isn't a good play

The Heights Players' production of the wholesome classic, "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," manages to capture some of Charles Schulz's rich combination of childhood wonderment and adulthood existential crises, though it remains a mystery why the theater would put on a kids show at 8 pm.

Though it was undeniably brilliant and influential, "Peanuts" is the perfect example of art commercialized beyond recognition. The musical, written by late Brooklyn Heights resident Clark Gesner and originally performed in 1967 when Schulz was at the peak of his powers, mostly attempts to recreate the experience of reading a four-panel Peanuts strip through short vignettes that feature Snoopy reflecting on how much he loves the sky, or Lucy's romantic frustration as Schroeder pounds away on his piano, ignoring her dreams of marriage.

This formula is not without its flaws: The musical lacks any central narrative, and while the quick gags might be a hit with kids, parents may find them exhausting by the time the two-hour performance reaches its last song.

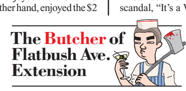
Still, the actors did a solid job of capturing the central aspects of each character — Charlie Brown can't catch a break, Lucy is an annoying know-it-all, Snoopy is perfectly content, and Linus, well, he has his blanket. Heather DiBianco's powerful voice was perfect for Lucy's tyrannical ways, and Eason Smith stole the show with an entertaining portrayal of Snoopy's daydream as a World War I pilot on the hunt for his nemesis, the Red Baron.

But all wholesomeness aside, one can't help but wonder why the cast dispensed with Schultz's hilarious facial expressions, which are so fundamental to his cartoons. Look at the final panel of any Peanuts strip, and you will likely see Charlie Brown saying "Good grief" with a frown on his face and a scribbled cloud over his head, perfectly capturing the frustration of youth. The cast of "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" rarely achieved such expressive moments.

Jan VanderPutten

The Butcher didn't love "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" at the Heights Players through Dec. 20.

That opening night at the Heights Players' Willow Place theater, there were only three kids in attendance. Still, it seemed they had greatly enjoyed the show. The Butcher, on the other hand, enjoyed the $2 Budweisers, but grew tired when this feel-good show ran a bit long.



Suddenly, a MetLife commercial with Snoopy frolicking around didn't sound so unappealing.

"You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" at the Heights Players [26 Willow Pl. between Joralemon and State streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 237-2752] will run through Dec. 20. Showtimes are Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm, and Sunday at 2 pm. Tickets, $20 (kids and seniors, $18).

'Mrs. Cratchit' is the real ghost

The Gallery Players' production of "Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge" is a whirlwind of behind-the-times references along with parodies of familiar figures from Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol."

If the directors of the "Scary Movie" franchise had decided to lampoon classic Christmas stories, the result would be something like Christopher Durang's "Mrs. Bob Cratchit" — and I don't mean that in a good way. For instance, one of the story's central twists is that the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future have been consolidated into one sassy black woman — when, oh when, will this cliché be permanently laid to rest?

Cameos from characters in the Enron scandal, "It's a Wonderful Life," "Gift of the Magi" and even the TV show "Touched By An Angel" round out the pop culture grab-bag that might have felt fresh in 2002, when the production premiered (in Pittsburgh, no less). We've come to expect a lot more from the usually sharp Durang (best known for the religious satire, "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You").

Still, this semi-musical's flaws were not the fault of the actors, who gamely executed all the slapstick humor — though Scrooge's spasmodic "Bah humbug" consistently fell flat — and cling to the plot, which completely flies off the rails in the second half, thanks to some time traveling to 1970s New York, the random appearance of a second angel, and even a Mia Farrow reference (yes, it's that lame).

The story's central premise is two scrooges are better than one. During his tour of the past, present and future, the curmudgeon of Dickens's classic slowly recognizes a kindred spirit in Mrs. Cratchit, who can't stand her kids, her nauseatingly optimistic husband, and her sorry lot in life.

So, Mrs. Cratchit goes on a bender, promising her family that she'll throw herself off of London Bridge. Meanwhile, the ghost of all three Christmases (Safiya Fredericks) flounders with her time travel skills, throwing Scrooge (Douglas Rees, reprising the original role) and Mrs. Cratchit (the ever-ebullient Joanna Parson, a game trouper if there ever was one) into one predicament after another.

As the second half wound to a close, the capable cast joined in a final number that explicitly tried to determine the point of the previous two hours. The actors' conclusion: "If you're poor, you can be happy. If you're mean, you better get some money." Fair enough, but it's hard to imagine many in the audience leaving in a jolly mood after forking over $18 for this Christmas catastrophe.

"Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge" at the Gallery Players [199 14th St. between Fourth and Fifth avenues in Park Slope, (718) 595-0547] will run Thursdays through Sundays through Dec. 20. Tickets, $18 (kids and seniors pay $14).

DINING

Tapas time

Take a fashion guru's interior design skills and mix it with the small plates of Spain and the cocktails of a hipster lounge and you have Bar Celona, the hot new tapas bar.

The Brooklyn Paper / Andy Campbell

Hidden on S. Fourth Street, Bar Celona offers that rare mix of great food, humbly priced (and authentic) cocktails, and a chic, warm, date-night atmosphere fitting for the fashionista who designed it.

"I've always wanted a hot lounge without the guy at the door with a list," said Cynthia Diaz, owner and designer of the spot. "That, paired with good food and good drinks, didn't exist, so we brought it here."

Diaz called in Chef Jordy Lavanderos — a genuine Spaniard — to create the menu, which features mostly light, tasty delicacies reminiscent of the city that cheekily lends its name to the joint.

Standouts included bombas, small breaded codfish balls over a sweet orange-garlic marmalade, and the seafood-filled paella. Both were perfectly matched with a Sea Monkey, a specialty gin and tonic comprised of celery and apple juices, lemon, Anise del Mono and fennel salt.

Bar Celona [104 S. Fourth St. near Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg, (718) 237-7828]. Live jazz on Sunday. For info, visit barcelonaloungenyc.com.

— Andy Campbell

DINING

Hot stuff

If you Google the term "hot sauce," you will get roughly 680,000 responses. But if you Google "Egyptian hot sauce," the number drops to about 35.

BP / Bess Adler

The reason? There really isn't any such thing as Egyptian hot sauce — but Aladin "Mr. Falafel" Habib is trying to change that.

Habib, who opened his Park Slope restaurant in 1982, only this year started bottling his homemade pepper sauce, bowing finally to requests from customers.

Habib's elixir is not a Middle Eastern version of Dave's Insanity nor does it come in a bottle shaped like a mushroom cloud (as some do). The secret is a mild burn that's perfect on grilled chicken or a schwarma, and doesn't tear a hole through your pita (or your palatine glands).

"We're going for taste, not explosion," he said.

Habib's most-loyal fan is Ed Sheehan, a PR guy who encouraged Habib to sell the unique sauce for $4.49 a bottle. "It's a fresh, locally made, delicious product," he said. "And Habib is a great Brooklyn guy."

Mr. Falafel [226 Seventh Ave. between Third and Fourth streets in Park Slope, (718) 768-4961] or by ordering at www.mrfalafels.com.

— Gersh Kuntzman

DINING

Pollo libre

Every Brooklynite has a discount card for his friendly neighborhood coffee shop — buy 10 coffees, get one free. Finally, this vital customer service has come to live poultry.

"I got customers that come everyday, so I wanted to make it fair for them," said Carlo Formisano, the manager of La Pera Brothers live poultry market in Dyker Heights.

BP / Stephen Brown

The punchcard gimmick is limited to chickens, but customers will also find quail, pigeons, lamb, goats, rabbits and turkey.

The 53-year-old La Pera Brothers is not for the sensitive carnivore, but it is for anyone looking for truly fresh meat (the slaughtered flesh is still warm as you carry it out).

"There is nothing like a fresh-killed chicken," Formisano said.

And don't even get Formisano started on store-bought birds, which he says is so foul that he's never eaten it. "The immigrants understand," Formisano said, "But Americans don't. They're too used to buying from a box.

"People from Africa, Asia, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Muslims — we kill for everybody."

La Pera Brothers [1373 61st St. at 14th Avenue in Dyker Heights, (718) 438-2577]. Closed Monday.

— Stephen Brown

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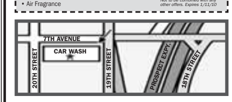

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WHERE TO GO

EDITORS' PICKS

SUNDAY
December 13

A new 'tradition'

The folks from the "Broadway Musical Fantasy Camp," a workshop for amateurs who always wanted to be in a Broadway show, bring the fun to Union Temple for, what else?, a performance of "Fiddler on the Roof" (with a real rabbi in the Tevye role, even).

4 pm. "Fiddler on the Roof" at Union Temple [17 Eastern Pkwy. between Plaza Street East and Underhill Avenue, (718) 638-7600]. Tickets, $20. "Latke and vodka" reception at 3 pm.

TUESDAY
December 15

One hot talk

He's been in the Times and in the Post trashing "cap and trade," but world-renowned NASA climatologist James Hansen is also one of the leading believers in global warming — which even W. believes is happening, so stop denying! He'll speak tonight near the Gowanus. Maybe he can advocate for fixing the canal, too!

8 pm. Secret Science Club at The Bell House [149 Seventh St. at Third Avenue in Gowanus, (718) 643-6510], www.thebellhouseny.com.

WEDNESDAY
December 16

Hip hop church

Sure, he hails from the Bronx, but you gotta love rapper KRS-One. An originator of Boogie Down Productions, he later turned his attention to Stop the Violence, his response to thuggery among 1990s rap artists. Now he's pitching an 800-page Bible, "The Gospel of Hip Hop: First Instrument," which is a little out there, but, hey, it's KRS-One, live, in Brooklyn.

7 pm. KRS-One at Powerhouse Arena [37 Main St. between Front and Water streets in DUMBO, (718) 666-3049].

FRIDAY
December 18

Cary on!

If you've never seen "His Girl Friday," you simply must see this classic Howard Hawks screwball comedy. First of all, it's about the newspaper business (in the good ol' days, not like today). Second, Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell fire off one-liners like Gatling guns. Best of all, it's cynical and funny in ways that today's comedies just aren't.

2, 4:30, 6:50 and 9:15 pm. Brooklyn Academy of Music [30 Lafayette Ave. near St. Felix Street in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100], www.bam.org. Tickets, $11.

SATURDAY
December 19

Sheep station

You don't have to be religious — heck, you don't even have to believe in God! — to get a kick out of the annual "Living Nativity Scene" at the New Utrecht Reformed Church, which is also one of the oldest churches in the borough. Join live animals, live Magi, a live Mary and Joseph and, alas, a Jesus doll at this great event.

3-6 pm. Living nativity scene. New Utrecht Reformed Church [18th Avenue at 83rd Street in Bensonhurst, (718) 236-0678].

NINE DAYS IN BROOKLYN

FRI, DEC. 11

First night of Hanukkah

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: "Official" menorah in Downtown, followed one-hour later by the Park Slope menorah. **Free**. 2 pm. Cadman Plaza [Court Street at Montague Street in Downtown Brooklyn, (718) 596-4840], www.heightscabad.com; Grand Army Plaza (Union Street between Flatbush Avenue and Prospect Park West).

FILM, "TREELESS MOUNTAIN": Directed by So Yong Kim. Part of the "Next Director" series. With a Q&A with the director before the 7 pm screening. $11. 4:30, 6:50 and 9:40 pm. Brooklyn Academy of Music [30 Lafayette Ave. near St. Felix Street in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100], www.bam.org.

ART OPENING: Artwork by Philip Naude. **Free**. 6–9 pm. Fun Times [257 Third Ave. at Union Street in Gowanus], funtimesbrooklyn.com.

TREE LIGHTING: Sponsored by the 13th Avenue merchants. 7 pm. (Corner of 13th Avenue and Bay Ridge Parkway in Dyker Heights), www.dykerheightscivicassociation.com.

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": A revival directed by Liv Ullmann. $40-$120. 7:30 pm. BAM Harvey Theater [651 Fulton St. at Rockwell Place in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100], www.bam.org.

OPERA, "ARIADNE AUF NAXOS": Strauss's masterpiece. $20. 7:30 pm. Brooklyn Lyceum [227 Fourth Ave. at President Street in Park Slope, (718) 857-4616], www.brooklynlyceum.com.

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": Multi-media theater piece based on David Lean's famous film. $57-$80. 8 pm. St. Ann's Warehouse [38 Water St. at Dock Street in DUMBO, (718) 254-8779], www.stannswarehouse.org.

THEATER, "MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE": A revival of Christopher Durang's Dickensian spoof. $18. 8 pm. Gallery Players [199 14th St., between Fourth and Fifth avenues in Park Slope, (212) 352-3101], galleryplayers.com.

THEATER, "LE SERPENT ROUGE": Skin-loving Company XIV reprises last year's hit. $25. 8 pm. Company XIV [303 Bond St. in Carroll Gardens], www.CompanyXIV.com.

MUSIC, CLASSICAL CONCERT: John Cage Sonatas and "Interludes for Prepared Piano." $25 ($20 senior, $10 student). 8 pm. Bargemusic [Fulton Ferry Landing, Old Fulton Street and Furman Street in DUMBO, (718) 624-2083], www.bargemusic.org.

READING, SPOKEN WORD: Miguel Algarin performs. **Free**. 9 pm. BAM Café [30 Lafayette Ave. at Ashland Place in Fort Greene, (718) 230-4100], www.bam.org.

SAT, DEC. 12

PERFORMANCE

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 2 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

Up in the air: Suspended Cirque's holiday event is "The 12 Acts of Christmas," a Santa-themed circus on Dec. 19 and 20 at Galapagos Art Space in DUMBO.

THEATER, "MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE": 2 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 2 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

MUSIC, "ANOTHER CHRISTMAS, ANOTHER SHOW": Holiday-themed musical revue. $10. 2 pm. Our Lady of Angels [74th Street between Third and Fourth avenues in Bay Ridge, (718) 680-6949], www.narrowscommunitytheater.com.

THEATER, "SNOW WHITE": Skin-loving Company XIV offers a new look at a classic. $20. 3 pm. Company XIV (303 Bond St. in Carroll Gardens), www.CompanyXIV.com.

MUSIC, GRAND STREET COMMUNITY BAND: The annual holiday concert. Suggested donation $10. 3 pm and 8 pm. Grand Street Campus HS (850 Grand St. in Williamsburg).

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 7:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

CLASSICAL CONCERT: Bach cello suites with Nathaniel Rosen. $25 ($20 senior, $10 student). 8 pm. Bargemusic [Fulton Ferry Landing, Old Fulton Street and Furman Street in DUMBO, (718) 624-2083], www.bargemusic.org.

ROCK, SOUL AND HIP-HOP: Earth-driver and The Citizens perform.

CIVIC CALENDAR

SUN, DEC. 13

76th Precinct. Have your car, truck, bike or electronics etched for security purposes. Or make an appointment for other times. Free. 6-9 pm. 76th Precinct stationhouse [191 Union St., between Henry and Hicks streets in Carroll Gardens, (718) 834-3211].

MON, DEC. 14

Community Board 10. Full board monthly meeting. 7:15 pm. Shore Hill Community Room [9000 Shore Road in Bay Ridge, (718) 745-6827], www.bkcb10.org.

TUES, DEC. 15

Community Board 2 Transportation Committee. Monthly meeting. 6 pm. St. Francis College [180 Remsen St., between Court and Clinton streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 596-5410].

84th Precinct Community Council. Monthly meeting. 7 pm. Location to be determined, (718) 875-6850.

WED, DEC. 16

76th Precinct. 6-9 pm. See Sunday, Dec. 13.

Community Board 2 Land Use Committee. Monthly meeting. 6 pm. Polytechnic University [5 Metrotech Center (Jay Street between Willoughby and Johnson streets) in Downtown Brooklyn, (718) 596-5410].

Community Board 7. Monthly full board meeting. 6:30 pm. Community Board 7 office [4201 Fourth Ave. at 43rd Street in Sunset Park, (718) 854-0003].

To list an event in the Civic Calendar, e-mail Calendar@cnglocal.com

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Find lots more listings online at **BrooklynPaper.com/Events**

Free. 9 pm. BAM Café [30 Lafayette Ave. at Ashland Place in Fort Greene, (718) 230-4100], www.bam.org.

SALES AND MARKETS

PS 321 FLEA MARKET: Free. 9 am-5 pm. PS 321 schoolyard (Seventh Avenue and First Street in Park Slope), www.parkslopefleamarket.com.

PARK SLOPE GREENMARKET: Brooklyn's answer to Union Square. 9 am-4 pm. Grand Army Plaza [Union Street at Flatbush Avenue in Park Slope, (212) 788-7900], cenyc.org.

BROOKLYN FLEA: Free. 10 am-5 pm. Bishop Loughlin HS (357 Clermont Ave. at Lafayette Avenue in Fort Greene), www.brownstoner.com/brooklynflea.

HOLIDAY CRAFT FESTIVAL: Features creative hand-crafted gifts: ceramics, jewelry, apparel, plush toys, organic cosmetics, glass works, photo art and home goods. 10 am. Brooklyn Historical Society [128 Pierrepont St. at Clinton Street in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 222-4111].

HOLIDAY ARTISAN FAIR: Crafts, jewelry, fashion and lots of bee-related projects — all sponsored by Erica's Rugelach. 11 am–6 pm. [137 St. Felix St. between Hanson Place and Atlantic Avenue in Fort Greene, (718) 965-3657], www.planbeecentral.com.

ARTISTS AND FLEAS: Free. 11 am-6 pm. [129 N. Sixth St. between Bedford Avenue and Berry Street in Williamsburg], www.artistsandfleas.com.

HOLIDAY JEWERLY AND SKIN CARE MARKET: Brooklyn-based jewelers, and a new organic skin care "gem" from upstate. **Free**. 11 am–6 pm. [180 Eighth Ave. between First Street and Garfield Place. in Park SLope, (646) 584-3531], www.madduxdelux.com.

HANDMADE CRAFTS FAIR: Custom clothes and jewelry, clocks and electronics, bathing suits and lingerie, baby clothes and toys, hats, scarves, gloves and more. noon–6 pm. 3rd Ward [195 Morgan Ave. at Stagg Street in Bushwick, (718) 715-4961], www.3rdward.com.

OTHER

READING, KIDS BOOK FAIR: Authors Michael Buckley ("Sisters Grimm") and John Bemelmans Marchiano ("Madeline and the Cats of Rome") will read at this all-day book fair and sale. **Free**. 10 am–4 pm. Brooklyn Heights Montessori School [185 Court St. at Bergen Street in Cobble Hill, (718) 858-5100 x112], www.bhmsny.org.

READING, JESSICA HAGEDORN: Author of "Cosmopolis." **Free**. 4 pm. Brooklyn Public Library's Central branch [Grand Army Plaza at East-

See **9 DAYS** on page 10

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A 'Streetcar' you'll desire

The Butcher of Flatbush Ave. Extension

Watching the Brooklyn Academy of Music's gripping but inconsistent — though sold-out nonetheless! — production of "A Streetcar Named Desire," one could not help but feel the vague palimpsest of one of the last big productions on the same BAM Harvey stage, Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard."

Though the plays are separated by decades of history — and thousands of miles of geography — "Streetcar" director Liv Ullmann (yes, *that* Liv Ullmann) has wrested a thematic connection between the story of fading Russian aristocracy and the mental collapse of that archetypal faded Southern belle, Blanche DuBois.

No doubt Ullmann's Scandinavian background — and her collaborations with Ingmar Bergman — helped tilt the tone of this production of the Tennessee Williams classic away from American melodrama and towards the Russian's trademark laughter-through-tears tragicomedy.

The subtle shift of emphasis not only broadens one of the play's universal messages — in short, "S—t happens" — but allows the show's star, Cate Blanchett, to walk the horrifying (and, ultimately, gratifying) high wire between Blanche's mental delusions and her pride.

Blanchett's performance is remarkable in so many ways, but the most important of which is how funny her Blanche is. Yes, all the ticks and frailties and manipulation that Williams wrote into the character are front and center, but Blanchett isn't afraid to allow Blanche to actually get laughs.

Robin McLeavy also shines in the less-thankful role of Blanche's sister Stella, imbuing the character with the altogether different Chekhovian impulse to blithely float through life even as the whole world is collapsing around you — in her case, her marriage to a brutal abuser who raped her sister.

But Ullmann's direction is not without its flaws. First, I'm not sure she ever solved the epic challenge of staging "Streetcar": What to do with Stanley.

In Ullmann's hands, Stanley Kowalski (the uber-masculine Joel Edgerton) alternates from animal brutality to bayou intellectual to sensitive husband. Edgerton is at his best with his shirt off, prowling around Ralph Myers's sparse set like a panther overdosing on Viagra. He's less convincing when he cowers after slapping his wife around, begging for a forgiveness that he does not deserve.

And at several critical moments in the play — Stanley's rape of Blanche, as well as his friend Mitch's foiled attempt to do the same — Ullmann's direction goes limp. Such moments are the climax of scenes that were perfectly built, line by line, by master-plotter Williams, but Ullmann wimps out at the most dramatic moment.

As a result, Stanley's rape of Blanche actually comes off as a moment of tenderness.

It's a black mark on the play — but not enough to detract from amazing performances in a Russian-tinged American classic.

"A Streetcar Named Desire" at Brooklyn Academy of Music (30 Lafayette Ave. between Ashland Place and St. Felix Street in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100) will run through Dec. 20. The entire run is sold out, but marked-up seats are available on www.stubhub.com.

Lisa Tomasetti

Southern belle: Cate Blanchett plays Blanche in the Liv Ullmann-directed revival of "Streetcar Named Desire" at BAM through Dec. 20.

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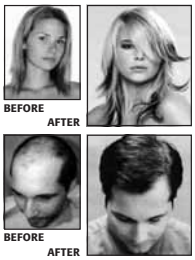

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DECEMBER RECOMMENDATIONS

RW&B Best Buys — Our Best Buys for December!

Oxford Landing GSM $9.95

Grenache, Shiraz & Mourvedre… what a delicious blend! Ripe aromas of raspberries, plums, white peppercorns, nutmeg & allspice… lush flavors of cherries, red berries, plums and more spices. This wine is a perfect cold weather red to serve with roasts, stews, chili & grilled foods.

San Jose Shiraz/Tempranillo $9.95

Beautiful purple shades in the glass. This Argentinean red is a full bodied wine with mature berries and spices. Well balanced in acidity and soft tannins we suggest you pair this with grilled lamb kabobs, pepper steak with sautéed mushrooms or a simple sausage and pepper hero.

Villa Pozzi Nero D'Avola $9.95

The 'Emperor' of Sicilian grapes! Look at the intensely dark red color and you just know that this wine will be rich and full bodied! The aromas are heady and seductive, with notes of fresh figs, blackberries, red raspberries, vanilla, saddle leather and white flowers. The complex red berry flavors are what you'd expect from a more expensive bottle: sumptuous, full bodied, creamy and concentrated.

Brut Pol Blanc $9.95

This Blanc de Blanc has all the bubbly qualities, but doesn't put a dent in your pocket. Big, bold, apple yeast aromatics give you a sensory rush to start and is followed by a well balanced length and mouth feel to this sparkling dry Chardonnay. Apples are prominent along with some expressive beading that tickles you in all the right places. Yes, it's that time of year to pop the bubbly. An EXCELLENT Value! Cheers!

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RW&B Discovery Wines — Our December Discovery Wines!

FROM HOSMER WINERY

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RW&B Spirit of the Month — December Spirit of the Month

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RW&B Cellar Selections — December Cellar Selection

Alta Catena Chardonnay $36.95

This is another perfect representation of why Nicolas Catena has been selected "Decanter of the Year for 2009." His 2007 Catena Alta Chardonnay has a bright greenish yellow color which has been barrel-fermented in 50% new French oak with native yeasts followed by 12-18 months in barrel with frequent batonnage. The nose shows an excellent mixture of citrus fruit interwoven with honeyed tropical fruit notes and floral tones and a hint of vanilla. The mouthfeel is rich and concentrated showing ripe pear, apple and apricot flavors with a light note of sweet nutmeg spice. The finish shows bright, clean acidity and wonderful length. We loved his Cabernet Sauvignon so much from last month's Cellar Selection as did you, we decided to showcase his Alta Chardonnay this month. This is the PERFECT stocking stuffer or holiday gift for that one person we all know that has just about everything.

9 DAYS...

Continued from page 8

ern Parkway in Park Slope, (718) 230-2100).

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: 6 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

FILM, JEWISH SPORTS FILMS: The annual Maccabi Film Festival featuring "Orthodox Stance." $5 per film. 6:30 pm. Park Slope Jewish Center [1402 Eighth Ave. at 14th Street in Park Slope, (718) 768-1453], www.psjc.org.

FILM, CHARLIE CHAPLIN SHORTS: Silent film with live piano accompaniment. $10. 7 pm. Brooklyn Baptist Temple (360 Schermerhorn St. at Third Avenue in Downtown Brooklyn), www.brooklynago.org.

SPORTS, MAJOR LEAGUE DREIDEL: Top-spinning competition, plus latkes and a performance by Gods of Fire. $15. 8 pm. Knitting Factory [361 Metropolitan Ave. at Havemeyer Street in Williamsburg, (347) 529-6696], www.MajorLeagueDreidel.com.

FILM, EYE CANDY FOR STRANGERS: Part of a regular video series. **Free**. 10 pm. Brooklyn Bowl [61 Wythe Ave. between N. 11th and N. 12th streets in Williamsburg, (718) 963-3369], www.brooklynbowl.com.

SUN, DEC. 13

PERFORMANCE

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 1 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

MUSIC, THE GUYS FROM THE GUY'S ALL-STAR SHOE BAND: Pat Donohue, Richard Dworsky, and Gary Raynor perform their eclectic mix of music. **Free**. 1:30 pm. Brooklyn Public Library's Central branch [Grand Army Plaza at Eastern Parkway in Park Slope, (718) 230-2100].

DANCE, "THE COLONIAL NUTCRACKER": From the Dance Theatre in Westchester. $6. 2 pm. Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College [2900 Campus Rd. at Hillel Place in Flatbush, (718) 951-4500].

THEATER, "ANOTHER CHRISTMAS, ANOTHER SHOW": 2 pm. See Saturday, Dec. 12.

THEATER, "MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE": 3 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 3 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

MUSIC, CLASSICAL CONCERT: 3 pm. See Saturday, Dec. 12.

HOLIDAY CONCERT: Show tunes, Jewish/Israeli songs, opera and a dash of jazz. $20, adults; $8, students. 3 pm. Congregation Mount Sinai [250 Cadman Plaza West in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 875-9124], www.congregationmountsinai.org.

OPERA, "ARIADNE AUF NAXOS": 3:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

MUSIC, CHRISTMAS CONCERT: Free. 4 pm. St. Finbar's Church [138 Bay 20th St. at Bath Avenue in Bath Beach, (718) 236-3312].

MUSIC, BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIA CHORUS: Carols and selections from Handel's "Messiah." $20. 5:30 pm. St. Augustine's Church [116 Sixth Ave. between Park and Sterling places in Park Slope, (917) 279-2576].

THEATER, "EVERY MAN MAKES A WOMAN CRY": Three women, three stories, one bond. $30. 6 pm. Brooklyn Music School Playhouse [126 St. Felix St. between Lafayette Avenue and Hanson Place in Fort Greene, (718) 638-5660], brooklynmusicschool.org.

MUSIC, M.A.S. SWING BAND: Big band performs the great American songbook. **Free**. 6 pm. Cafe Remy [7110 Third Ave. between 71st and 72nd streets in Bay Ridge, (718) 748-0748].

THEATER, "FOOLS MASS": Presented by Dzieci, practitioners of "holy theater." $15 (suggested). 7 pm. St. John-St. Matthew-Emanuel Lutheran Church [283 Prospect Ave. in Park Slope, (718) 638-6037].

MUSIC, COUNTRY CHRISTMAS CONCERT: Featuring Wayne Hancock with Jack Grace and Terry Radigan. $20. 7 pm. Southpaw [125 Fifth Ave. at St. Johns Place in Park Slope, (718) 230-0236], www.spsounds.com.

SALES AND MARKETS

PS 321 FLEA MARKET: See Saturday, Dec. 12.

ARTISTS AND FLEAS: See Saturday, Dec. 12.

HOLIDAY ARTISAN FAIR: See Saturday, Dec. 12.

FARMERS MARKET: Free. 11 am–5 pm. J.J. Byrne Park (Fifth Avenue and Fourth Street in Park Slope).

HOLIDAY CRAFTS MARKET: Also features a competition between a bull and a bear (it's a stock market thing). **Free**. Noon–5 pm. Invisible Dog [51 Bergen St. in Cobble Hill, (347) 981-4186], www.theinvisibledog.org.

OTHER

HOLIDAY CRAFT FESTIVAL: See Friday, Dec. 11.

TALK, DEFENDING THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE: Jason Stewart leads. 11 am. Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture [53 Prospect Park West at Second Street in Park Slope, (718) 768-2972], www.gchmusic.org.

FILM, JEWISH SPORTS FILMS: 1–9 pm. See Dec. 12.

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: 5 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

MON, DEC. 14

HOLIDAY CRAFT FESTIVAL: 11 am. See Friday, Dec. 11.

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: 5:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

FILM, "NATURALLY OBSESSED — THE MAKING OF A SCIENTIST": Gripping documentary about life in a science lab. With a Q&A with filmmakers Carole and Richard Ritkind. $11. 7 pm. Brooklyn Academy of Music [30 Lafayette Ave. near St. Felix Street in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100], www.bam.org.

READING, "BEYOND BELIEF — A PHILOSOPHICAL PROOF OF SANTA CLAUS": A comic lecture by Jamie Hooks as part of the Open City Dialogue Lecture Series. 7:30 pm. Pete's Candy Store [709 Lorimer St. at Richardson Street in Williamsburg, (718) 302-3770], www.petescandystore.com.

TUES, DEC. 15

HOLIDAY CRAFT FESTIVAL: 11 am. See Friday, Dec. 11.

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: 5 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 7:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

TALK, WORLD-RENOWNED CLIMATOLOGIST JAMES HANSEN: NASA expert will speak as part of the Secret Science Club. $4. 8 pm. The Bell House [149 Seventh St. at Third Avenue in Gowanus, (718) 643-6510], www.thebellhouseny.com.

WED, DEC. 16

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 2 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: 5 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

COMEDY WITH THE UPRIGHT CITIZENS BRIGADE: A benefit for Global Giving Circle. $25. 7 pm. Galapagos Art Space [16 Main St. at Water Street in DUMBO, (718) 222-8500], www.galapagosartspace.com.

READING, KRS-ONE: Rapper gives his philosophy as he reads from "The Gospel of Hip Hop: First Instrument." **Free**. 7 pm. Powerhouse Arena [37 Main St. at Water Street in DUMBO, (718) 666-3049], www.powerhousearena.com.

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 7:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

MUSIC, MATISYAHU: Hasidic rapper's annual show. $35. 8 pm. Music Hall of Williamsburg [66 N. Sixth St. between Kent and Wythe avenues in Williamsburg, (718) 486-5400], www.musichallofwilliamsburg.com.

MUSIC, ROOTS AND RUCKUS: Weekly American folk showcase. $5. 9 pm. Jalopy [315 Columbia St. at Woodhull Street in Columbia Street Waterfront, (718) 395-3214], www.jalopy.biz.

MUSIC, IRISH MUSIC WITH SAFE HAVEN: Monthly gig. **Free**. 9 pm. Brooklyn Lyceum [227 Fourth Ave. at President Street in Park Slope, (718) 857-4816], www.savehavenirish.com.

THURS, DEC. 17

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: 5 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

TALK, BEHIND THE SCENES ON "THE SIMPSONS": **Free**. 7 pm. Brooklyn Public Library's Central branch [Grand Army Plaza at Eastern Parkway in Park Slope, (718) 230-2100].

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 7:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

HOLIDAY BENEFIT CONCERT: The Sirens of Brooklyn raise money for Women To Women International. $20. 8 pm. First Unitarian Church [50 Monroe Place in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 768-3859].

MUSIC, MATISYAHU: 8 pm. See Wednesday, Dec. 16.

MUSIC, CHRISTMAS CAROL CONSPIRACY: Sixth annual anti-caroling event presented by Kings County Opry. 9:30 pm. Freddy's Backroom [485 Dean St. at Sixth Avenue in Prospect Heights, (718) 622-7035], www.freddysbackroom.com.

FRI, DEC. 18

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: 2 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

FILM, "HIS GIRL FRIDAY": One of the greatest films ever, with Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell firing off one-liners like Gatling guns. $11. 2, 4:30, 6:50 and 9:15 pm. Brooklyn Academy of Music [30 Lafayette Ave. near St. Felix Street in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100], www.bam.org.

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 7:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "FOOLS MASS": Presented by Dzieci, practitioners of "holy theater." $15 (suggested). 7:30 pm. Old Stone House [336 Third St. between Fourth and Fifth avenues in Park Slope, (718) 638-6037], www.theoldstonehouse.org.

MUSIC, HOLIDAY CONCERT: Brooklyn Youth Chorus performs choral masterpieces. $15. 7:30 pm. Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral [113 Remsen St. at Henry Street in Brooklyn Heights, (917) 822-8942], brooklynyouthchorus.tix.com.

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

MUSIC, NEOLIT ENSEMBLE: Works by Dvorak, Haydn, Schoenfield. $35 ($30 senior, $15 student). 8 pm. Bargemusic [Fulton Ferry Landing, Old Fulton Street and Furman Street in DUMBO, (718) 624-2083], www.bargemusic.org.

JAZZ AND SOUL SHOW: Leena Conquest performs. **Free**. 9 pm. BAM Cafe [30 Lafayette Ave. at Ashland Place in Fort Greene, (718) 230-4100], www.bam.org.

MUSIC, CHAMBER CONCERT: Works by Haydn, Shostakovich and Brahms. $30. 8 pm. First Unitarian Church [Pierrepont Street between Clinton Street and Monroe Place in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 858-0718], www.brooklynchambermusicsociety.org.

SAT, DEC. 19

PERFORMANCE

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 2 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE": 2 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE": 2 pm and 7:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

DANCE, "NUT/CRACKED": A comic rethinking of "the Nutcracker." $25. 2 pm. Brooklyn Arts Exchange [421 Fifth Ave. at Eighth Street in Park Slope, (718) 832-0018], www.bax.org.

THEATER, "A CHRISTMAS CAROL": Stripped-down version of the Dickens story presented without frills by Genesis Rep. $10 (suggested). 7 pm. Genesis Rep [376 Bay 44th St. in Bath Beach, (718) 486-5400], www.genesis-repertory.org.

DANCE, "THE NUTCRACKER": Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company. **Free**. 7 pm. Richard Perry Theatre at Poly Prep [7110 Third Ave. at 71st Street in Bay Ridge, (718) 680-0944].

MUSIC, HOLIDAY CONCERT: Brooklyn Youth Chorus. 7:30 pm. See Friday, Dec. 18.

THEATER, "BRIEF ENCOUNTER": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

THEATER, "MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE": 8 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

MUSIC, VIOLINIST MARK PESKANOV: Works by Brahms, Schubert, Beethoven. $35 ($30 senior, $15 student). 8 pm. Bargemusic [Fulton Ferry Landing, Old Fulton Street and Furman Street in DUMBO, (718) 624-2083], www.bargemusic.org.

MUSIC, CHRISTINE LAVIN: Unique and funny holiday songs. $35. 8 pm. First Unitarian Church [50 Monroe Place in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 288-5994].

MUSIC, MATISYAHU: 8 pm. See Wednesday, Dec. 16.

MIDDLE EASTERN MUSIC: Tamar performs. **Free**. 9 pm. BAM Cafe [30 Lafayette Ave. at Ashland Place in Fort Greene, (718) 230-4100], www.bam.org.

SALES AND MARKETS

PS 321 FLEA MARKET: See Saturday, Dec. 12.

PARK SLOPE GREENMARKET: See Saturday, Dec. 12.

BROOKLYN FLEA: See Saturday, Dec. 12.

ARTISTS AND FLEAS: See Saturday, Dec. 12.

HOLIDAY CRAFT MARKET: Free. 11 am–7 pm. Brooklyn Lyceum [227 Fourth Ave. at President Street in Park Slope, (718) 857-4816], www.bkcraftcentral.com.

OTHER

RELIGION, LIVING NATIVITY SCENE: The annual creche with live actors and animals. **Free**. 3–6 pm. New Utrecht Reformed Church [18th Avenue at 83rd Street in Bensonhurst, (718) 236-0678].

RELIGION, MENORAH LIGHTINGS: 6 pm. See Friday, Dec. 11.

FILM, "HIS GIRL FRIDAY": 6:50 and 9:15 pm. See Friday, Dec. 18.

Rock and roll: The Pretty Things Peepshow, a rockabilly-themed burlesque, will excite Southpaw on Dec. 19.

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DeBlasio bails on secret favor for school

By Stephen Brown
The Brooklyn Paper

Outgoing Councilman Bill DeBlasio has backtracked on his secretive effort to allow a politically connected private school to move ahead with a two-story extension atop one of the courtyards that give Carroll Gardens is very character.

DeBlasio's initial effort to insert an exemption for the Hannah Senesh School into a city administrative code was immediately discovered by local preservationists and bloggers last week, prompting the kind of outrage typically reserved for large-scale development projects, not a two-story addition atop a school parking lot.

But the parking lot in question, along First Place at the corner of Smith Street, is not merely a piece of city-owned land, but an architectural feature that is fundamental to the neighborhood. Indeed, such deep lots along First though Fourth places are what give Carroll Gardens its name.

After widespread complaints that DeBlasio's exception would set a dangerous precedent, the Councilman, who becomes the public advocate on Jan. 1, withdrew his amendment.

The Brooklyn Paper / Crosby Kaufman

The school hopes to build on this First Place lot.

"I'm pleased to report that Councilman DeBlasio agreed to hold off," DeBlasio's successor, Councilman-elect Brad Lander, announced at a meeting at the Hannah Senesh School on Monday night, winning one of his first semi-official rounds of applause from the crowd of 50.

The school's extension will now be taken up as part of the normal public process that accompanies any request for a land-use change.

But winning the battle did not calm many angry locals. After all, the "battle" has only begun.

That much was clear as architect Larry Horowitz passed around a rendering of the proposed addition. Many did not hide their revulsion.

"The proposed building is hideous," said Barbara Brookhart, a member of the Carroll Garden Neighborhood Association. "We're all pretty upset by this."

But former Councilman Ken Fisher, now lobbyist for the school, denied that DeBlasio's amendment would set a precedent that would lead to further developments on residential courtyards, which are zoned as part of the street due to an odd regulation signed into law in the mid-19th century.

"If DeBlasio believed this would have opened the gates of hell, he wouldn't have considered it," Fisher said, hailing DeBlasio's leadership last year in fighting for the neighborhood's unique streets.

This rendering of the proposed addition did not please opponents of Hannah Senesh School's expansion bid.

The Brooklyn Paper / Andy Campbell

Beloved Cadman Towers mailman Santos Caraballos returned on Saturday to the building he has served for decades.

Returned to senders!

Beloved Heights mailman is finally back

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

Hundreds of residents of a Brooklyn Heights apartment tower hailed the return of their beloved letter carrier, four months after their building had been removed from his route amid supposed budget shortfalls.

On Saturday, mailman Santos Caraballos was no longer stayed from the swift completion of his appointed rounds, thanks to a bit of luck and a decision by the United States Postal Service to return him to Cadman Towers, where he had worked (and garnered fans) for 21 years.

"Four months was like four years," said one resident of the towers who complained that Caraballos's replacement never could get it right.

"Never getting my mail was hell!" she said, hugging the returning hero. "Plus, he's just a phenomenal guy."

But before you go writing a thank you note to your congressman or the postmaster general, Caraballos's return only happened because the route that now includes Cadman Towers became open this month — not because someone intervened to put Cadman Towers back in Caraballos's route.

In the end, he engineered his return himself, applying for the route this month.

Of course, the dozens who greeted Caraballos with high-fives and signs that read, "Welcome back, Santos!" didn't care how they got their man back.

"He really is the last vestige of community in this city," said Toba Potosky, the board president. "He was there for my marriage, my grandparents' anniversary, and he was there for me when they passed away. He's touched everyone's lives here."

For his part, the humble Carabalos said he was no disgruntled postal worker, even though the bureaucrats had left him without his favorite stop.

"It's good to be back," he said. "I couldn't believe it when people rallied behind me. It's a happy time."

The Brooklyn Paper PARENT
KIDS • SCHOOL • STYLE • TEENS • CAMPS • MUSIC

A wacky Marriott sleepover

It was Luvbud's 12th birthday and Luvbud's Mom wanted to do something really special for her: a night at a hotel with four of her best friends.

So Luvbud Mom booked two rooms at the Brooklyn Marriott and told Luvbud to invite her BFFs.

But there was one problem: Luvbud's Mom had to stay home to care for her mother, who isn't well. She called Smartmom with the bad news.

"I can chaperone the girls," Smartmom told her.

"Are you sure? " she asked.

"No problem. I don't mind spending a night in a hotel with five 12-year-old girls," Smartmom said.

When the Oh So Feisty One got wind of the plan she was none too happy.

"Why can't Luvbud's mom do it. That would be SO much better," OSFO told her.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," Smartmom said. "But it's me or no party."

On Saturday, Smartmom and the girls walked to the subway in the rain. Smartmom made sure to stay about a block ahead of the girls because she knew that OSFO wouldn't want her hovering too close.

In fact, OSFO doesn't like Smartmom hovering too close most of the time.

The allergy kicked in right around her 12th birthday last March and it hasn't let up at all. Sometimes she actually looks ill when Smartmom enters her room.

Back to Saturday: Smartmom checked into the hotel as the girl swooned at the sight of the hotel's pretty lobby Christmas tree.

"I'm two doors down from you girls," Smartmom told OSFO and her friends.

"And the pool is open 24 hours," she added.

"Yay. We can go swimming at midnight," one of the girls said.

When the girls entered their room, they squealed with the delight and immediately started jumping on their beds. OSFO quickly ushered Smartmom out of the room and made it clear that Smartmom wasn't welcome.

Smartmom did check in every half hour or so to see what they were up to. She told them they should go swimming, but they were too busy trying on each other's clothes and putting on makeup in the bathroom.

By Louise Crawford

Smartmom had lots to do in her private hotel room. She brought her laptop fully intending to write her column or read a book. Instead she found herself feeling very, very relaxed and sleepy on the ultra comfortable mattress with its soft, soft, cotton sheets.

Smartmom woke up to a hard knock on the door. It was OSFO and the girls dressed in their bikinis.

"The pool was closed," OSFO told her, clearly annoyed. "It's not open 24 hours like you said."

"Really? That's what the woman at the front desk told me — unless I misunderstood," Smartmom said, sailing through a sea of unhappy faces. "My bad. But you can go swimming in the morning. The pool opens at 9 am," she added, restoring the levity.

About an hour later, Smartmom knocked on their door to see if the girls were ready for dinner, but there was no answer. She banged some more. Still no answer. She did experience a moment of panic. Had they been asphyxiated by makeup or poisoned by nail polish remover?

She managed to stay calm and went downstairs to the Archives Restaurant to see if they were there.

Sure enough, the BFFs were eating dinner in the crowded restaurant. Looking like 12 going on 23, they were all beautifully dressed up in skirts or dresses and they were drinking …

"They're *virgin* Strawberry Daiquiris," one of the girls told Smartmom.

"We were having Shirley Temples, but then we ordered these," another girl said.

Smartmom had to laugh. It occurred to her that this could be construed as prealcoholic behavior, but she flicked the thought out of her mind like an annoying mosquito. The girls were having fun.

As planned, Smartmom met Hepcat in the lobby for dinner. They sat and ate their dinner at the bar — far away from the girls. He had a Virgin Guinness while Smartmom had a Virgin Chardonnay. When the girls were finished with dinner, OSFO came over to Hepcat.

"Can I borrow your camera," she asked, all sugar no spice.

"Umm, it's the new camera," he said nervously. "Do you know how to use it?"

"Of course I do," OSFO said, taking the camera.

After dinner, Smartmom and Hepcat watched "White Christmas" in the hotel room as he waited nervously for the return of his camera. Around midnight, Smartmom knocked on the door.

"Yes?" OSFO said through a small crack.

"Can I have the camera?" she said.

"One minute," OSFO said, shutting the door.

OSFO returned a minute later with the camera. She handed it over.

"And don't look at the pictures," she said, shutting the door again.

"I think she should see the pictures," Smartmom heard another friend say through the door.

"Omigod. They took 315 photographs," Hepcat exclaimed checking his camera to make sure it was still in good working condition (which it was). "And they're really good," he added. "Did you know they ordered from room service?"

"They did?" Smartmom gasped.

Sure enough there was a photo of a waiter carrying a tray. There were three other trays visible in the picture. Luvbud's Mom would not be happy.

"They sure made a mess of that room," he said. "And they jumped on the bed."

Indeed, the photographs were fantastic: a perfect lens into the crazy, fun, exuberant world of Luvbud's 12th birthday party at the Marriott.

Smartmom may not have been a fly on the wall, but Hepcat's camera was able to capture better than thousands of words what it was like on that magical night.

A birthday/slumber party at the Marriott: Expensive, trust me.

A night of fun with your BFFs (and OSFO's mother, father and SLR camera): priceless.

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FAMILY CALENDAR

FRI, DEC. 11

8 pm: "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." Classic family musical. $20. Heights Players [26 Willow Pl. between Joralemon and State streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 237-2752], www.heightsplayers.org.

SAT, DEC. 12

11:00 am: Brunch with Santa. Raffles, food and a visit from the Big Man. $10, adults, $5 children. Radegast Hall & Biergarten [113 N. Third Street in Williamsburg, (718) 963-3973].

12 pm: "'Twas The Night Before … MONSTERS!" Holiday show for kids. $5. Brooklyn Lyceum [227 Fourth Ave. at President Street in Park Slope, (718) 857-4816], www.brooklynlyceum.com.

Noon: "Anthropomorphic." A free show by Puppetry Arts Theater. **Free**. Regal Cinema [106 Court St. between Livingston and State streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 768-3703].

Noon–10 pm: "Sesame Street" screenings. All-day big-screen presentation to mark the show's 40th season. $11 ($8 for kids under 12). Brooklyn Academy of Music [30 Lafayette Ave. near St. Felix Street in Fort Greene, (718) 636-4100], www.bam.org.

12:30 and 2:30 pm: Puppet show, "Peter and the Wolf" and "The Frog Prince." $8 (kids, $7). Puppetworks [338 Sixth Ave., at Fourth Street in Park Slope, (718) 965-3391], www.puppetworks.org.

1 pm: "Jigsaw Jones — The Case of the Class Clown." **Free**. Brooklyn Public Library's Central branch [Grand Army Plaza at Eastern Parkway in Park Slope, (718) 230-2100].

1:30 pm: Science power hour. Learn about nature. Prospect Park Audubon Center [Enter park at Lincoln Road and Ocean Avenue in Prospect Park, (718) 287-3400], www.prospectpark.org/audubon.

2 pm: "A Charlie Brown Christmas." Classic show for kids. $10. Brooklyn Lyceum [227 Fourth Ave. at President Street in Park Slope, (718) 857-4816], www.brooklynlyceum.com.

2–5 pm: St. Nick (not his real name) makes his annual appearance along Flatbush Avenue in Park Slope. **Free**. Various locations [Flatbush Avenue between Bergen Street and Grand Army Plaza in Park Slope, (718) 783-1685].

SUN, DEC. 13

Noon: "'Twas The Night Before … MONSTERS!" See Saturday, Dec. 12.

Noon: "Anthropomorphic." See Saturday, Dec. 12.

Noon–10 pm: "Sesame Street" screenings. See Saturday, Dec. 12.

12:30 and 2:30 pm: Puppet show, "Peter and the Wolf" and "The Frog Prince." See Saturday, Dec. 12.

1:30 pm: Science power hour. See Saturday, Dec. 12.

2 pm: "A Charlie Brown Christmas." See Saturday, Dec. 12.

2 pm: "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." See Friday, Dec. 11.

2 pm: The Klezmatics Hanukkah Party. $15 ($12 seniors, students). Kingsborough Community College [2001 Oriental Boulevard in Manhattan Beach, (718) 368-5596], www.kbcc.cuny.edu.

MON, DEC. 14

11:30 am: Story time with Emily. Weekly event. Moxie Spot [81 Atlantic Ave. between Hicks and Henry streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 923-9710], themoxiespot.com.

TUES, DEC. 15

11 am: Storytime for kids. Weekly reading series. **Free**. Barnes & Noble Court Street [106 Court St. between Livingston and State streets in Downtown Brooklyn, (718) 246-4996].

11 am: Singalong with Lloyd. Moxie Spot (see venue info above).

WED, DEC. 16

1 pm: Storytime with Emily. Moxie Spot [81 Atlantic Ave. between Hicks and Henry streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 923-9710], themoxiespot.com.

THURS, DEC. 17

11 am: Dance around with Nat. Moxie Spot [81 Atlantic Ave. between Hicks and Henry streets in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 923-9710], themoxiespot.com.

5:30-7:30 pm: Learn basic electronics. Three weekly sessions will explore circuitry and everything else for ages 10-15. $100 (suggested). The Doorway [210 23rd St. in Greenwood Heights, (410) 967-5207], www.partsandcrafts.org.

FRI, DEC. 18

11:30 am: Storytime with Emily. See Wednesday, Dec. 16.

7 pm: "A Charlie Brown Christmas." See Saturday, Dec. 12.

8 pm: "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." See Friday, Dec. 11.

SAT, DEC. 19

12 pm: "'Twas The Night Before … MONSTERS!" See Saturday, Dec. 12.

12:30 and 2:30 pm: Puppet show, "Peter and the Wolf" and "The Frog Prince." See Saturday, Dec. 12.

1 pm: Jon Samson presents original songs for kids. **Free**. Brooklyn Public Library's Central branch [Grand Army Plaza at Eastern Parkway in Park Slope, (718) 230-2100].

1–3 pm: Kids theater and fun day featuring Richard Lewis and Touchstone Center Theatre Ensemble. $10 adult and child (additional child is $5). Irondale Center [85 S. Oxford St. at Lafayette Avenue in Fort Greene, (718) 488-9233], www.irondale.org.

1:30 pm: Science power hour. See Saturday, Dec. 12.

2 pm: "A Charlie Brown Christmas." See Saturday, Dec. 12.

7 pm: Jingle Bell Jamboree. The annual family concert. Suggested donation $5. Old First Reformed Church [729 Carroll St. at Seventh Avenue in Park Slope, (718) 638-8300].

8 pm: "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." See Friday, Dec. 11.

To list your event, visit: BrooklynPaper.com/events/submit

BIKE LANE

Continued from page 1

Hasidic officials refused to talk about the issue this week, but one insider said that political pressure was exerted on the city to remove the lane.

"It was a power play by Hasidic leaders who need to scare community members into behaving," said Baruch Herzfeld, the Orthodox Jewish owner of the Traif Bike Geschaft shop on S. Sixth Street. Herzfeld, together with environmental advocacy group Time's Up!, is organizing a rally in support of the lane on Sunday, to be led by a brigade of bicycle clowns.

The Department of Transportation didn't exactly deny the allegation that the Hasidic community demanded the bike lane's removal, merely referring The Brooklyn Paper back to its original statement that called the lane's removal a "network readjustment."

The agency said it will fight back against the repainting this week.

"Any paint remaining after [Wednesday's] rainfall will be removed," said Scott Gastel, an agency spokesperson.

The bike advocacy organization Transportation Alternatives condemned the removal of the lane, but recommended that, like Rosa Parks or Gandhi, bikers should employ passive resistance.

"Cyclists need not risk arrest to ensure their right to ride on Bedford Avenue. It is theirs," said Wiley Norvell, communications director for the group.

Time's Up! Bicycle Funeral Procession and Vigil for the Bedford Bike Lane will be at 2 pm on Dec. 13. Meet at the Brooklyn entrance to the Williamsburg Bridge.

BONDS

Continued from page 1

million to build the hardcourt Xanadu at the intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush avenues, Ratner will still need to pony up anywhere from a few million to a few hundred million, depending on the final cost of constructing the arena, which is in the $800-million to $1-billion range.

The bond-rating announcement is yet another signal that the Atlantic Yards project is entering a new phase — one that the opposition has fought tooth and nail to avoid.

Last month, New York State's highest court ruled that the state could legally use its eminent domain to seize the property of the remaining holdouts in the Atlantic Yards footprint.

EXPLAINER…

Continued from page 1

Why are only $500 million in bonds being offered when the arena is set to cost almost $1 billion?

That's another offshoot of the low rating. Because Ratner must pay out more in interest on the riskier notes, he can't extend himself beyond the $500 million. Bond experts say that he might have gotten a higher rating on his bonds — and could have issued more of them at a lower interest rate — if he had more equity in the project. But he's about to sell 80 percent of the team — and 45 percent of the arena — to a Russian billionaire.

Bottom line time: What's it all mean for Ratner?

His profit margins just got a close shave. Because the state is only ponying up $500 million in bonds, Ratner will have to seek additional financing — some of it from his own pocket. Developers prefer to play with the house money, not their own.

The Brooklyn Hospital Center: Keeping Brooklyn Healthy?

Recent scientific studies* have found that high RN caseloads put patients at greater risk for complications. The Brooklyn Hospital is unwilling to agree to a balance of RNs to patients that would promote safe patient care. **Is this keeping Brooklyn healthy?**

The hospital is **demanding pay cuts** from its most experienced nurses, the ones with 25 or more years of service, and who have the most on-the-job expertise and knowledge. The hospital is also refusing to bring RNs' salaries up to levels competitive with surrounding Brooklyn hospitals. **This is causing more nurses to leave the facility and makes it difficult to replace them. Is this keeping Brooklyn healthy?**

Ask the management of The Brooklyn Hospital Center to **listen to its RNs.**

- Increase the number of RNs working in patient care areas!
- Provide RNs with the compensation they have earned, at levels competitive with neighboring hospitals!

*"Hospital Nurse Staffing and Patient Mortality, Nurse Burnout, and Job Dissatisfaction," *Journal of the American Medical Association,* 2002; "Nurse-Staffing Levels and the Quality of Care in Hospitals," *New England Journal of Medicine,* 2002; *Health Care at the Crossroads: Strategies for Addressing the Evolving Nursing Crisis,* Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, 2002.

Let's *really* keep Brooklyn healthy!

Call Brooklyn Hospital Center CEO Dr. Richard Becker at 718-250-8005 today and ask him to listen to his RNs!

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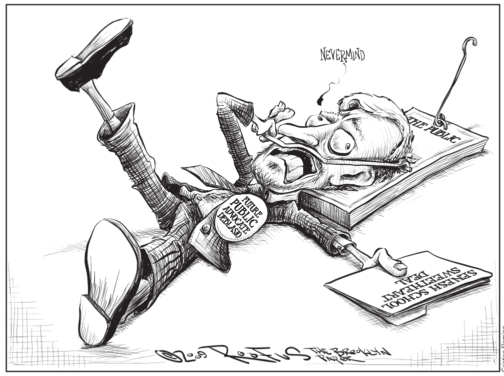

Cristian Fleming

OUR OPINION

Advocating for whom?

The future Public Advocate has a lot of explaining to do.

And this guy is going to be the *public* advocate?

This week, Councilman Bill DeBlasio agreed to withdraw an ill-advised attempt to hide a key land-use change from his Carroll Gardens constituents — but the backtrack came only after a reporter from this newspaper and the excellent neighborhood blog Pardon Me for Asking discovered DeBlasio's secretive move on behalf of a politically connected private school.

Here's what happened: Thanks to a quirk in city law, the front yards of houses on First through Fourth places in Carroll Gardens are actually mapped as part of the street, which is why houses on those blocks are set back so far from the roadway.

One of those "front yards" is actually a parking lot for the Hannah Senesh School, which wants to build a two-story addition on the land.

But the school can't move forward unless the city administrative code is changed.

Enter Bill DeBlasio.

The councilman, who actually led the fight to protect such yards last year, slipped language into the administrative code that would have exempted the school's parking lot.

Fortunately, he was caught.

The problem is not necessarily with Hannah Senesh's desire to expand onto the lot. The problem is that the school's first step towards doing so was to hire big bucks lobbyist Ken Fisher, a former councilman himself, and get the current officeholder to change a law without so much as a public hearing.

It also didn't look good that a member of the school's board contributed more than $700 to DeBlasio's public advocate campaign this year.

The good news is that as a result of the public outrage over DeBlasio's foiled effort, both the proposed change to the "front yards" code and the expansion plan itself will now be sent through the city's rigorous public review process.

That debate will happen well after DeBlasio has ascended to the city's second-highest elected office on Jan. 1 — the one that bears the name "public advocate."

This troubling incident concerns us that he will not live up to it.

LETTERS

Former 'abused' worker speaks about labor pains

To the editor,

I was hesitant to write you, but after reading your two weeks of coverage of the alleged labor abuses at Park Slope restaurants ("Labor pains," Nov. 27 and "Alien nation," Dec. 4), I really need to get this off my chest.

I worked at Olive Vine Cafe for seven years as a pizza man. I made pizzas and helped at the salad bar. I worked between 72 and 80 hours a week and my weekly salary was $400.

We were not allowed to drink sodas or eat anything from the restaurant — in fact, we had to buy our own food, and God forbid the boss (Zaid Demis) saw us eating for more than 20 minutes.

Now, he is complaining that he doesn't have $200,000 to pay. Well, ask him this: how about he sells his Mercedes S500 or his house or pay from the money he received for selling the restaurant on 15th Street.

I remember once, I asked him for three days off because I was extremely sick, and my daughter was sick, too. He said OK, but also said that I would not get paid for that week. So because I was afraid that I might not have enough money for the month, I went to work very sick.

I would love to reveal my identity, but I know what he will do to me or my kids if he knew who it was.

Former Olive Vine worker

Feel the noise

To the editor,

Stephen Lippman rightly complains about the noise made by Fresh Direct trucks ("'Direct' rage," letters, Nov. 13). That noise is made by the compressor just above the roof of the cab.

But the real problem is not that all Fresh Direct trucks are noisy; it is that only some of them are. Many times I have not even noticed that one of their trucks had be delivering to a neighboring building until I see it drive away. Others, however, I can hear in the back of my apartment, a hundred feet away from the street, even with all our the windows closed.

What accounts for this? Some of their drivers run the compressor on its highest speed. The others realize that this is completely unnecessary. My wife or I have communicated with Fresh Direct going back at least three years. We have been assured that the drivers will be retrained. We have also been told that a new model of compressor will be installed on all their trucks.

We are still waiting.

David Hawkins, Park Slope

Protectionism

To the editor,

Roy Sloane and his colleagues at the Cobble Hill Association are to be lauded for their efforts to preserve the architectural heritage of their neighborhood ("Neighbors will be Jonesing for Norah's windows," Dec. 4).

But their opposition to a homeowner inserting windows into a blank side wall in a mid-block rowhouse is a case of overly literal historic preservationism. The fact is that this wall was never intended to be exposed at all, since it was expected that an adjacent structure would have covered it up at some point (or did once). It's only by happenstance that it is visible now, and from an urban design perspective, its blankness is an aesthetic shortcoming rather than a positive contribution to the beauty of the streetscape.

If there are any doubts that the original architect or builder of the Jones structure would have inserted windows and other features themselves had they known of the structure's future condition, one need only look at the side walls of the vast majority of rowhouses located at the end of a brownstone block. One will find not only numerous instances of standard fenestration, but boldly projecting bay windows and other elements that connect inside and out as well.

Donald Rattner, Brooklyn Heights

30 more years!

To the editor,

Congratulations on your 30th anniversary ("Special anniversary issue," Nov. 20). It was a great trip down memory lane of your proud history.

While daily papers concentrate on international, national, statewide, business and sports news, weekly newspapers such as our own Brooklyn Paper fill the void for coverage of local community news.

Newspapers have to deal with increasing costs for newsprint, delivery and distribution along with reduced advertising revenues and declining readership, but we continue to be fortunate to live in one of the few remaining free societies with a wealth of information sources available.

There continues to be an ongoing circulation battles between a number of daily newspapers including the Times, Daily News and Post. They face competition from other daily newspapers who have a strong presence in their own communities such as Newsday, the Staten Island Advance, the Journal News in Westchester, Putnam, Rockland and Dutchess counties, and the Star Ledger in New Jersey.

There are also national editions of USA Today and the Wall Street Journal along with freebies such as AM New York and Metro New York. More people turn to all-news radio, national network news such as ABC, CBS, NBC along with their local affiliates, News 1, FOX-5, WOR-9, WPIX-11 and PBS, cable new stations such as CNBC, CNN, FOX, BBC and the Internet for late-braking news which can sometimes become stale by the time it reaches print the next day.

A growing population of new immigrants support their own newspapers, and radio and television stations. And don't forget weekly papers such as the Village Voice, New York Press and New York Observer.

In the marketplace of ideas, let us hope there continues to be room for everyone, including The Brooklyn Paper. All fill a valuable niche on the information highway.

Larry Penner, Great Neck, L.I.

He told us so!

To the editor,

In reference to last week's story, "Still-new condo under the knife" (Dec. 4), there should be no surprises here. With all my love to my new neighbors in new condos built in the past five years, I have to say again: I told you so.

Shoddy construction on a "green" building due to a rush to compete within the market has led to another mess, just like so many other new developments. And it's only two years old. God help all of us, new owners included, to what affect these defective and decaying structures will bring to the neighborhoods in 10 years!

And if this is any indication as to what can happen in just two years (on what was supposedly touted as a responsible development), I can't wait to see what happens on any of the monsters on Fourth Avenue, on 15th and 16th streets and with the 11 buildings on the 614 Seventh Ave. site, all of which use the same Parex material cited in your story.

As a community activist, I sadly feel vindicated. As the chair of the Community Board 7 Buildings and Construction committee, I humbly look forward of working with our new neighbors when (not if) they come to the board for advocacy as their buildings crumble.

It's a sad day in Mudville and a sad day in Brooklyn.

Aaron Brashear, Greenwood Heights

The writer was recently named the "mayor" of Greenwood Heights by The Brooklyn Paper.

Send a letter

By e-mail: newsroom@cnglocal.com

By mail: Letters, The Brooklyn Paper, One Metrotech Center, Suite 1001, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

All letters must be signed and include the writer's home address and phone number (only the writer's name and neighborhood are published with the letter). **Letters may be edited and will not be returned. The earlier in the week you send your letter, the better.**

Bloomy: City $ for more 'park'

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

Brooklyn Bridge Park's ill-fated Piers 2 and 3, which were essentially put on the back-burner when the park's price tag topped $300 million last year, would be back in the picture if the city is given control of the long-delayed greenspace.

Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe said on Monday night that the city would pump in $55 million to jumpstart the construction of basketball courts, an in-line skating area, and a seasonal "bubble" for indoor recreation on the two piers — but the money comes with a big string attached: the state must turn over the long-stalled development project to the city.

"This will be the best thing that's happened to New York City in a century," Benepe said at the meeting at Long Island College Hospital.

Not everyone in the crowd of more than 100 was so sure.

For one thing, the new money wouldn't completely fill a $120-plus-million budget gap that sent piers 2 and 3 into limbo in the first place, though Benepe and state Sen. Daniel Squadron (D-Brooklyn Heights) tried to assure the crowd that more capital money would become available as portions of the park got built.

Right now, Pier 1, at the foot of Old Fulton Street, and Pier 6 at Atlantic Avenue, are nearing completion — the first phase of construction in a waterfront development that was first envisioned in the 1970s.

The Brooklyn Paper / Bess Adler

Work on Pier 1 at Brooklyn Bridge Park is almost done, but Pier 2, above, is stalled until the city or state coughs up the big bucks.

Most telling, however, Benepe did not discuss whether a city takeover would alter the park's controversial funding mechanism — which currently calls for housing and a hotel to be developed inside the park footprint. Fees from residents and guests would generate the 1.3-mile park's $15-million annual maintenance fee.

With the housing market collapsed and such development currently off the table, Squadron has called for nearby landowners to foot the bill in the form of a tax reassessment based on their increased property values from being so close to a world-class park.

Earlier in the day, mayoral spokesman Andrew Brent presaged Benepe's silence on the housing-in-the-park plan.

"Right now, housing is still part of the park plan," Brent said. "Unless another funding stream can be established, that's the plan."

In addition to active recreation space at Pier 2 and 3, any remaining city cash would go toward constructing a sound-dampening berm that would deflect Brooklyn-Queens Expressway noise away from the park, plus adding in a pedestrian bridge from Squibb Park to the new waterfront greenspace.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Methodist is the consumer's choice — again!

New York Methodist Hospital has won the National Research Corporation's 2009-10 "Consumer Choice Award" winner — the fourth year in a row that the Park Slope medical institution has received the award for providing the highest quality service in the community.

The award recognizes hospitals with outstanding service and quality — specifically, the best doctors, nurses, overall quality, and image/reputation — in 250 markets.

NRC's Healthcare Market Guide Ticker, the nation's largest and most comprehensive study of its kind, surveys more than 200,000 households in the contiguous 48 states and the District of Columbia.

Winners are determined by consumer perceptions on multiple quality and image ratings.

"We are delighted at this confirmation of what we already believed: New York Methodist's efforts to provide the very finest patient care and medical services are recognized and appreciated by the Brooklyn community," said Mark J. Mundy, president and CEO of New York Methodist Hospital. "We are so grateful to our dedicated physicians, nurses, allied healthcare workers, support staff, trustees and volunteers. They exemplify the high level of healthcare that we provide at New York Methodist — and they truly deserve to be honored with this award.

"In the years to come, New York Methodist expects to maintain the high standard of care that it has put in place," he concluded.

New York Methodist expands acute dialysis unit

Recognizing the growing demand for hemodialysis treatment in the community, New York Methodist Hospital has expanded its in-patient dialysis unit.

The hospital recently purchased new, state-of–the art dialysis machines with help from a federal grant. In addition to the purchase, the hospital also increased the size of the unit to accommodate more patients.

"The expansion is a great thing and we are all very excited," said Kotresha Neelakantappa, the hospital's chief of nephrology.

The high incidence of kidney disease in Brooklyn has led to an increase in demand for dialysis treatments, which removes poisons and toxins from the blood. Failure to do so can lead to kidney failure or the need for a transplant.

Uncontrolled diabetes is the primary cause of kidney impairment. But any disease that affects the blood vessels, including high blood pressure or atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), can hinder the kidneys' ability to detoxify the blood and regulate fluids in the body.

Signs of kidney impairment include changes in urine and swelling or puffiness, particularly around the eyes, wrists, abdomen, thighs or ankles. The problem is, kidney disease usually has no symptoms until its later stages.

New York Methodist has a partnership with the Rogosin Institute, the premier not-for-profit medical treatment and research institution for kidney disease in New York City. The Institute provides outpatient dialysis treatment for patients with chronic kidney disease.

"The expansion has made our in-patient unit more efficient, more sophisticated and better equipped to handle the influx of patients," said Lawrence Stam, associate chief of nephrology and author of "100 Questions & Answers About Kidney Dialysis," a user-friendly guide to kidney disease and dialysis.

"A lot of work went into this book. It is part of our contribution to patients on dialysis," he added.

For information about dialysis treatment at NYM, call (718) 780-5800.

Suit: Coney plan is baloney!

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

The main opponents of a city plan to rezone Coney Island's faded amusement area in hopes of encouraging the development of housing, retail and a new 12-acre ocean-front amusement park have sued the city on the grounds that the new theme park isn't big enough to attract the hordes of tourists needed to sustain the long-sought revitalization.

The group, Save Coney Island, filed the lawsuit in Manhattan Supreme Court last week, claiming that rezoning the area to permit high-rise hotels would encourage profit-seeking developers to tear down historic buildings such as the Nathan's hot dog stand on Stillwell Avenue.

"The goal of this lawsuit is not to stop the redevelopment of Coney Island as a world renowned amusement district," said plaintiffs' lawyer Albert Butzel, "but to make it possible for that to happen. Responding to the interests of private developers and ignoring expert studies, the city has so reduced the area available for outdoor amusements that it will not be capable of regenerating a world-class Coney Island. [The city's] knuckling under to private development interests violated the law."

Last month, city officials heralded their purchase of seven acres of land from the neighborhood's principal landowner, Joe Sitt, for $96 million. That land, combined with other properties, will form the bulk of the 12-acre open-air amusement park, while Sitt prepares to develop his remaining land, mostly along Surf Avenue, into hotels, restaurants, retail stores and indoor attractions.

The Brooklyn Papers file / Tania Haas

Plaintiffs say that the amusement area in the city plan is too small.

That land buy came on the heels of the City Council's July approval of the Bloomberg rezoning blueprint, which seeks the new amusements, plus 4,500 units of new housing to the north and west of that area.

The lawsuit by Save Coney Island seeks the nullification of that rezoning, sending the city back to the drawing board.

In court papers, the plaintiffs assert that the city's Environmental Impact Statement failed to adequately address expert testimony that claimed that the proposed amusement area is too small to create a viable amusement park. As such, the EIS failed to adequately consider the impact that so much new, non-amusement development could have on Coney Island's historic resources.

The suit also contends that the city altered an earlier version of its rezoning plan to benefit Sitt rather than the public.

"The Bloomberg administration has tried to portray this rezoning as an effort to revitalize Coney Island," said Save Coney Island spokesman Juan Rivero. "In fact, this rezoning threatens to irrevocably squander the tremendous potential of this world-renowned 'People's Playground.'"

Not everyone is so sure. City officials have said that the rezoning will stand up to court scrutiny.

"The review process … was proper, and the plan was developed with extensive input from the local community," the Law Department said in a statement.

And Coney Island USA founder Dick Zigun, who has at times been critical of the city's rezoning effort, told the Daily News today added the suit could be counterproductive.

"Any business that exists in Coney Island desperately wants to see redevelopment happen immediately," he said. "I would like to see ground broken … yesterday. "I'm not looking to complicate things so that nothing happens."

In seeking to toss the environmental impact statement, the plaintiffs are following a similar approach as opponents of the Atlantic Yards project. But courts have consistently slammed the door on such suits.

In the meantime, dozens of amusement operators have already expressed interest in running an interim theme park on three large Boardwalk-fronting plots of land over the next few summers.

The Daily News reported on Sunday that 50 operators attended a city information session last month in Las Vegas — a big change from Coney's recent history, which has seen little interest from national operators.

The deadline for bids is Dec. 18.

LETHEM…

Continued from page 1

"I'm kinda getting sick of the book, really," Shearer said, falling deeper into his chair. But at this point, Lethem's little war was fodder for Shearer's own creative project: He's writing a book about attending book readings while on unemployment. It's called, "In the Front Row on the Dole."

"Every now and then, I get a woman out of it, but I'd come here anyway," he said.

By 11 pm, though, Shearer wasn't so sure. Lethem had already gone through three pinch-readers, a dinner and coffee. The sweat was gone, and his enunciation was flawless. But Shearer was done, his head hanging low. He left not knowing that Lethem actually will send him the book, anyway.

Two more hours went by, and there was still no sign of fatigue as Lethem kept on turning pages in this Manhattan-bashing page-turner about a former child star living off residuals and marijuana.

He paused every once in a while to let another person read for a few minutes or to extend an offer for those remaining to leave, but hopped back on with no apparent effort.

At 3 am, there were 13 fans left, still chuckling at every pot joke. Another hour went by — along with a dozen wine cups — when Lethem finally uttered the emotional words, "Only five more pages, you guys."

Cheers rang out among the living.

When he put the book down at 4:11, his remaining friends and family stood in applause. Lethem was still smiling but running on fumes, and said he felt "relief and disbelief" after the record-long reading was complete.

"I wasn't sure he would be able to pull it off, but here we are," said Lethem's brother Blake.

Hugs were exchanged and the final autographs were given. Lethem didn't say much, but he did give a hint of his next venture:

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A Rev-elation on Fourth Ave.

Rev. Billy brings his gospel to the Lyceum this Saturday

By Andy Campbell
The Brooklyn Paper

Thank consumerism, the reverend is back!

Perhaps it's a good thing that Rev. Billy — a.k.a. Windsor Terrace performance artist Bill Talen — got only one percent of the vote for mayor this year. Otherwise, he'd be preparing for his swearing in rather than for his latest performance piece: "Blessed are the Jobless! Blessed are the Broke!" this Saturday.

Of course, the same 40-person choir will be on hand to back up Talen as he regales the faithful with his old religion: stop shopping, spend more time with your family and stay away from the "Devil's monoculture: big box stores and chains."

The Brooklyn Paper file / Sebastian Kahnert

Rev. Billy is back with an anti–Christmas shopping message.

Talen says he won't stop 'til every last shopping bag drops. The good news is that the recession is a mixed blessing.

"We don't have as much money as we want to so we are being creative as a result," Talen said. "Creativity coming out of the pain and suffering is good."

Humor is Talen's medium, but he says that comedy is the only way to get his "don't-buy, get creative" message across these days.

"Are you buying less 'cause you're broke, or is it because you're being creative this year? It's both at the same time," Talen said. "If you're gonna do deep work like this, you gotta have fun."

Rev. Billy and the Church of Life After Shopping at the Brooklyn Lyceum [227 Fourth Ave. between President and Sackett streets in Park Slope, (718) 857-4816], Saturday, Dec. 12, 8 pm. Tickets, $10. For info, visit www.revbilly.com.

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EPA in no rush to Superfund

More tests coming for filthy canal

By Stephen Brown
The Brooklyn Paper

Hopes for the Gowanus Canal to quickly be designated a Superfund site were reined in last Thursday night as a top federal official cautioned that it is very rare for a proposal to be approved in less than a year.

"It is unusual for a Superfund listing to be made in less than one year, even for sites that aren't as controversial as this one," said Walter Mugdan, the regional Superfund director for the Environmental Protection Agency, which started the Gowanus process in April.

Given how much time has passed — and how much is already known about the toxic corpse of water — hopes were high that this informational meeting would actually serve as the forum for announcing the Superfund designation.

No such luck.

Instead, Project Manager Christos Tsiamis explained that even before Superfund designation is achieved, the EPA will conduct another battery of tests in the canal zone to determine the level of human risk presented by the filthy waterway, as well as point the way toward the ideal clean-up method.

Superfund designation for the Gowanus Canal, running parallel to Third Avenue from Douglas to Ninth streets, would set into motion a scramble for funds from companies (and their successors) identified as responsible for polluting it over the past two centuries.

The list includes oil companies, the energy giant National Grid and even the U.S. Navy and the city of New York, whose faulty sewer systems dump millions of gallons of raw sewage into the canal every year.

The Bloomberg administration has its own plan for cleaning the canal, one that it says will be faster and avoid the stigma of Superfund designation in a neighborhood lusted over by many private developers. But many locals believe that the federal effort will be more comprehensive, even though it is likely to be slower and, like the city plan, does not fix the sewage overflows, which would cost billions to remedy.

Regardless of the dueling plans, the EPA is moving ahead with tests as if the designation were just around the corner. Here are some interesting aspects of the research that was set to begin this week:

• Further analysis of the 10–12 feet of industrial waste in the canal.

• Further analysis of the six feet of "native" sediment below the toxic junk.

• A study of the 200 "discharge pipes" feeding raw sewage into the canal, as well as a search for any others that have yet to be found. Researchers will also hunt down the source of all the pipes.

• Digging small, unobtrusive wells roughly three to six inches in diameter that will measure the contamination in the soil around the canal.

A timetable also emerged at the meeting.

Superfund designation should be announced sometime in early 2010. In the meantime, EPA officials said the sampling will begin and continue until late in the summer of 2010, which they will then analyzed by the end of that year.

Then, the agency will prepare a "feasibility study" proposing various methods for cleaning up the contamination, which it will file in late 2011. Then, the EPA — barring any delays, of course — will choose a plan of attack for cleaning the Gowanus Canal in 2012.

Correction

Last week's story about alleged labor abuses at Park Slope restaurants — which reported that the worst offender was allegedly Coco Roco restaurant ("Restaurants' Wage War," Dec. 4) — had some erroneous information: the Coco Roco employee quoted in the story spells his first name Zack, not Zach. He still refused to comment on the substance of the state Labor Department's allegations.

Broadway Triangle plan moves forward

By Aaron Short
Community Newspaper Group

The Brooklyn Paper file / Bess Adler

A city plan to rezone the Broadway Triangle to encourage the development of affordable housing has moved forward. Some locals say that the plan doesn't create enough below-market-rate housing.

The City Council's Land Use Committee passed the controversial Broadway Triangle plan this week, all but clearing the way for approval from the full body — despite continuing outrage from a Bushwick councilwoman who opposes it.

The Council's Land Use Committee gave the approval in a surprisingly close 12–6 vote on Monday, clearing another hurdle for a plan to rezone a 31-acre industrial site in East Williamsburg to encourage the development of housing, some of it much-needed below-market-rate units.

Before the vote, Councilwoman Diana Reyna (D–Bushwick) made one final plea for her colleagues to send the proposal back to the drawing board.

"This rezoning is asking for the minimum in economic development and job creation and will displace businesses in the area," Reyna said. "All that I have been asking for is a plan that includes the community."

But Councilman Dan Garodnick (D–Manhattan) said he supported the rezoning because it will "revive an area that has been underutilized and to create more affordable housing for a community that everyone agrees is in great need of it."

Councilman Al Vann (D–Bedford-Stuyvesant) offered the oddest statement in support of the rezoning, which has been bitterly opposed by several community groups who claim that they were cut out of the planning process in favor of two politically connected groups.

"I agree that the process was flawed in that surrounding communities and their representatives were not adequately consulted," Vann said, "[but] I feel a greater loyalty to respect the preference of the community board and councilmember [David Yassky (D–Brooklyn Heights)] whose district is being rezoned."

After the vote, Reyna said she had no hopes of influencing the full Council to reject the rezoning when it votes in the next few days. Instead, she said opponents will now focus on a lawsuit, filed in September, that argues that the rezoning violates the Fair Housing Act.

"We have our community who stood firm on rejecting a process that excluded them, called for transparency and gave our community an opportunity to organize, come together," said Reyna. "How can you deliver a government for the people if people stand aside while decisions are being made on their behalf?"

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